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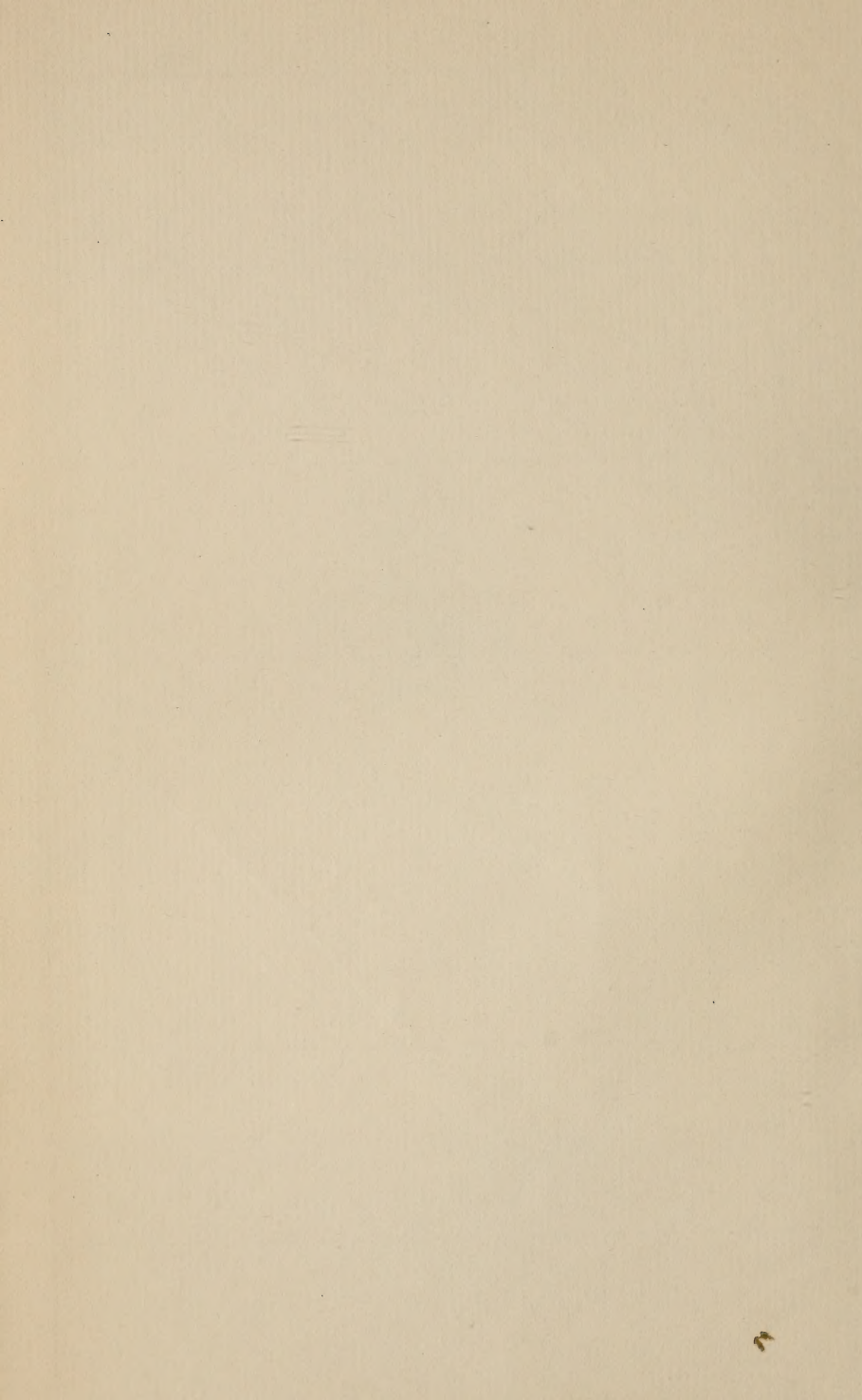
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THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH





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# THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH

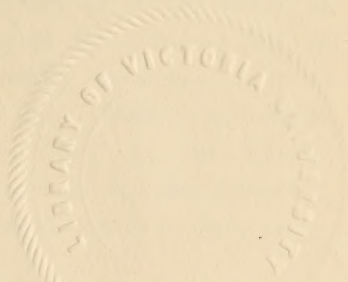
HIS LIFE, WORK, FRIENDS, AND SITTERS

BY

WILLIAM B. BOULTON

WITH FORTY ILLUSTRATIONS

METHUEN & CO.  
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## PREFACE

CONSIDERING the importance of the position occupied by Thomas Gainsborough in the British school of painting, surprisingly few details of his life have been preserved. His contemporaries appreciated and accepted his pictures without concerning themselves much with the man who produced them, and he had been dead sixty-eight years before any adequate attempt to write the history of his life and work was carried to completion. It is true that an eccentric neighbour of Gainsborough, in the person of Governor Philip Thicknesse, published a short memoir of the painter in the year of his death; true also that the interesting antiquary, John Thomas Smith, sometime Keeper of the Prints at the British Museum, and author of the amusing *Life of Nollekens* and other curious works, made an effort to collect information nine years later. But twenty-eight pages in Allan Cunningham's *Lives of the British Painters*, published in 1829, remained the sole authority upon the career of the painter until nearly seventy years after his death.

Cunningham's Life is necessarily incomplete and unconvincing, and it was not until the middle years of the nineteenth century that anything like an adequate

and connected account of Gainsborough's career appeared in the little volume written by the Fulchers, father and son. The elder of these gentlemen, as a fellow-townsmen of the painter, a scholar at the same grammar school, and a devoted admirer of his art, undertook the pious office of placing the main facts of his life upon record. He received and acknowledged help from most of the sources of information available at that late date; from Gainsborough's own family, in the persons of the Rev. Gainsborough Gardiner, Mr. Gainsborough Dupont, and Mrs. Sarah Browne; from Mr. Sheepshanks, the collector, and from Mr. C. R. Leslie, R.A., and Mr. R. J. Lane, A.R.A. Death, however, brought Mr. Fulcher's labours to a close in 1855, and his unfinished task, taken up by his son, was carried to completion in the following year.

The art of Gainsborough has since occupied the energies of many able writers, but, with the exception of some allusions in letters, memoirs, and lives of his contemporaries which have appeared from time to time, little has been added to our knowledge of the details of his life, and Fulcher's interesting volume seems likely to remain the chief authority.



# CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. BIRTH, PARENTAGE, AND BOYHOOD—1727-1745 .	1
II. SUFFOLK—1745-1759 . . . .	32
III. BATH—1760-1765 . . . .	66
IV. BATH—GAINSBOROUGH AND JACKSON . .	96
V. FRIENDS AT BATH . . . .	123
VI. WORK AT BATH—1767-1774 . . . .	152
VII. LONDON—1774 . . . .	193
VIII. LONDON—1775-1783 . . . .	232
IX. LONDON: LAST YEARS—1784-1788. . .	266
X. THE ARTIST . . . .	299
XI. THE MAN . . . .	320





## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

MRS. SHERIDAN . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
By Permission of the LORD ROTHSCHILD. From a Photograph by Messrs. BRAUN, CLEMENT & CIE.	
BRAMFORD, NEAR IPSWICH . . . . .	<i>Facing page 10</i>
STUDY IN CHALK . . . . .	" " 22
From the Original in the British Museum.	
MRS. GAGE AND CHILD . . . . .	" " 30
PRINCE AUGUSTUS FREDERICK . . . . .	" " 38
CORNARD WOOD . . . . .	" " 49
From the Original in the National Gallery.	
THE PAINTER'S DAUGHTERS . . . . .	" " 59
From the Original in the National Gallery.	
MR. AND MRS. SANDBY . . . . .	" " 64
GEORGE COLMAN . . . . .	" " 72
From the Original in the National Portrait Gallery.	
RICHARD, EARL GROSVENOR . . . . .	" " 80
COUNTESS SPENCER . . . . .	" " 86
From a Photograph of the Original by Mr. FRANZ HANFSTAENGL.	
DAVID GARRICK . . . . .	" " 94
LADY EDEN . . . . .	" " 102

LADY DUDLEY . . . . .	<i>Facing page</i> 112
MRS. MOODY AND CHILDREN . . . . .	120
From the Original in the Dulwich Gallery.	
THE DUCHESS OF CUMBERLAND . . . . .	128
THE PAINTER'S WIFE . . . . .	136
MRS. SHERIDAN AND MRS. TICKELL . . . . .	147
From the Original in the Dulwich Gallery.	
THE MARKET CART . . . . .	153
From the Original in the National Gallery.	
QUEEN CHARLOTTE . . . . .	164
From the Original at South Kensington.	
GIOVANNA BACCELLI . . . . .	172
COLONEL ST. LEGER . . . . .	180
GEORGE, PRINCE OF WALES . . . . .	188
MUSIDORA . . . . .	196
From the Original in the National Gallery. From a Photograph by Mr. FRANZ HANFSTAENGL.	
RALPH SCHOMBERG . . . . .	206
From the Original in the National Gallery.	
THE DUCHESS OF DEVONSHIRE . . . . .	216
THE HONOURABLE MRS. GRAHAM . . . . .	222
From the Original in the National Gallery, Edinburgh. From a Photograph by Messrs. T. & R. ANNAN.	
THE BLUE BOY . . . . .	230
From the Original in the possession of the Duke of Westminster. From a Photograph by Mr. AUGUSTIN RISCHGITZ.	
MARGARET GAINSBOROUGH . . . . .	241
From the Original in the National Gallery.	

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

xi

THE BAILLIE FAMILY . . .	<i>Facing page</i> 248
From the Original in the National Gallery.	
SIR HARBORD HARBORD . . . . .	258
MRS. SIDDONS . . . . .	264
From the Original in the National Gallery.	
THE ELDEST PRINCESSES . . . . .	270
THE MALL . . . . .	278
From a Photograph by Mr. FRANZ HANFSTAENGL.	
SQUIRE HALLET AND HIS WIFE . . . . .	286
By Permission of the LORD ROTHSCHILD. From a Photograph by Messrs. BRAUN, CLEMENT & CIE.	
QUEEN CHARLOTTE . . . . .	294
THE WATERING PLACE . . . . .	308
From the Original in the National Gallery.	
MRS. ROBINSON ("PERDITA") . . . . .	313
From the Original in the Wallace Collection.	
THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH, BY ZOFFANY . . . . .	322
From the Original in the National Gallery.	
MISS HAVERFIELD . . . . .	330
From the Original in the Wallace Collection.	





# THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH

## CHAPTER I

### BIRTH, PARENTAGE, AND BOYHOOD—1727-1745

THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH was born in the parish of St. Gregory Sepulchre, Sudbury, Suffolk, in the year 1727. The exact day of his birth is uncertain, but his baptism at the Independent Meeting-House on May 14th of the same year seems to fix the date with reasonable accuracy. He was the son of John Gainsborough of that town, and of Elizabeth, his wife, whose maiden name was Burroughs. John is represented by his biographers as a Nonconformist, and Elizabeth as of the Establishment; but as when John came to die he was buried in the parish churchyard of St. Gregory, it is possible that the particular creeds of the pair were the reverse of those generally accepted. On the other hand, Mrs. Gainsborough had certainly a brother in holy orders, the Rev. Humphrey Burroughs, who conducted the local Grammar School. The point is not of vast importance, but it may be accepted that one at least of Thomas's parents was of the Independent persuasion.

Both family and local tradition present John Gainsborough as a remarkable man. Cunningham reports the local recollection of "a stately and personable man, with something mysterious in his history, for the pastoral and

timid rustics of Suffolk suspected him of carrying a dagger under his clothes." Fulcher repeats the family tradition that John was "a fine old man who wore his hair parted carefully, and was remarkable for the whiteness and regularity of his teeth." He was accustomed to wear a sword, which we may take to be significant of some social pretensions in those days, and was reputed an adept in its use, and that with both hands. It was this sword perhaps that became a dagger in the rustic echo reported by Cunningham.

From deeds of conveyance and other documents relating to local property in Sudbury which had been handled by old Mr. Gainsborough, it is clear that he was connected with the staple woollen trade of that town, weaving, and the production of crapes—arts which had been brought to the Suffolk people by the Flemish weavers who had settled among them as early as the reign of Edward the Third, and under the patronage of that monarch. Thus in 1722 John Gainsborough is described as a "milliner"; in a mortgage deed of three years later he appears as a clothier, and in 1735 he is called a crapemaker. John appears to have added the cheerless occupation of making shrouds to the other branches of his business. Among many enactments of doubtful value passed in the reign of Charles the Second, was one which ordained that all Englishmen should be buried in a shroud of English manufacture, as a means of encouraging one of the national industries. The making of these articles had first taken root at Coventry, apparently, whence John Gainsborough imported the secret. This he managed to confine to his own establishment for some years, during which he found his monopoly very profitable.

Tradition asserts again that this hearty manufacturer was not debarred by his reputable character from in-



dulging on occasion in the then popular diversion of smuggling, and that he found his occupation of shroud merchant useful in that pastime. "On one occasion, when in his untaxed cart, which contained besides samples of the dresses for the dead a keg of smuggled brandy for the comfort of the living, some vague information of his supposed delinquencies was given to a Revenue officer, who on a bright moonlight night took occasion to inquire what he had in his cart. 'I'll show you,' was the ready answer, and catching up a shroud he enveloped his tall figure in the ghostly dress, to the astonishment and speedy departure of his weak-nerved nocturnal visitor."

John Gainsborough is represented as a man in a large way of business, and of an enterprising turn which took him at times into France and Holland. His reputation also was that of a man who suffered many losses from an easy good-nature, which made it difficult for him to press poor debtors for payment. He was ahead of his times, too, in refusing to take "toll" of his spinners' earnings, by some operation of truck which seems to have been a custom of the place. These virtues may have helped to bring about the disaster which overtook him in 1733, when he was gazetted a bankrupt.

Of Mrs. Gainsborough we know less. She is described as kind and indulgent to all her children and somewhat proud of her sons, as well as a woman of well-cultivated mind, and a noted painter of flowers. Fulcher opines that Thomas may have acquired, if he did not inherit, his love of art from seeing his mother engaged in that accomplishment. She affectionately encouraged him in his juvenile attempts at drawing, and lived to see her fondest wishes realised in her son's acknowledged eminence in the pursuit the love of which she had probably been the means of first awakening. Gainsborough was high in fame at Bath when his mother died, in 1769,

and was buried at the Independent Meeting-House at Sudbury.

This interesting couple had a quiverful—five sons, of whom Thomas was the youngest, and four daughters. We know little of some members of this large family, but, from some particulars which have survived of the two eldest, John and Humphrey, we judge them to have been in many ways a notable race. John, the eldest, appears to have been one of those visionary men of talent who need but a little ballast to become geniuses. He had a prodigious turn for the mechanical arts, and from his youth up was employed upon endless projects of a mechanical nature. He was known in the village as "Scheming Jack," but his reputation was also that of a man who seldom carried anything to completion. Years later, Thomas Gainsborough used to declare that he never knew his brother finish anything. "Curse it," was the Schemer's invariable explanation of his failures; "some little thing was wrong: if I had but gone on with it, I am sure I should have succeeded, but a new scheme came across me."

Jack's first notable performance was the construction of a flying machine with wings of metal, in which he essayed a public flight, but succeeded only in reaching the ground from the roof of a summer house, without hurt, but amidst the derision of the assembled villagers. One reads of him later as painting a signboard for a local publican, and taking his revenge for what he considered a mean bating of his price by painting the Bull in distemper, which disappeared after the first shower. What his means were we do not know, but it is certain that they were usually dissipated by the purchase of material for his numberless experiments, and benefactions from his brother Thomas in the prosperity of later years went the same way. Governor Thicknesse has left an account

of this unfortunate, which is evidently drawn from the life.

“I never saw John Gainsborough but once, and that is more than twenty years ago. But passing through Sudbury, where he has always resided, I visited him as a friend of his brother. Previous to seeing him I sat an hour with his wife, and asked her whether Mr. Gainsborough, her brother, did not assist them. ‘Oh yes,’ said she, ‘he often sends us five guineas, but the instant my husband gets it he lays it all out in brass-work to discover the longitude.’ At that instant her longitudinal husband appeared; he would not suffer me even to tell him my name, or that I was a friend of his brother, but brought forth his curious brass-work, and, after showing me how nearly it was completed, observed that he only wanted two guineas to buy brass to finish it. I could hardly determine whether his deranged imagination or his wonderful ingenuity was most to be admired, but I informed him that I had not capacity to conceive the genius of his unfinished work, and therefore wished him to show me such as was completed. He then showed me a cradle which rocked itself, a cuckoo which would sing all the year round, and a wheel that turned in a still bucket of water. He informed me that he had visited Mr. Harrison and his timepiece, ‘but,’ said he, ‘Harrison made no account of me in my shabby coat, for he had lords and dukes with him. After he had shown the lords that a great motion of the machine would noways affect its regularity, I whispered to him to give it a gentle motion. Harrison started, and in return whispered me to stay, as he wanted to speak to me after the rest of the company were gone.’ I then,” continues Thicknesse, “took my leave of this eccentric and unfortunate man without giving him the two guineas solicited, and now lament that he has lost the aid of his



excellent brother, for, alas, without aid he cannot subsist, and must be verging upon, if not past, fourscore years of age, for he said he was several years older than his brother Thomas."

It is possible that the poor flighty John was nearer the accomplishment of one at least of his undertakings than it seemed. This Harrison mentioned by Thiccnese was the winner of the Government premium of £20,000 for the production of a chronometer which should enable the longitude to be found within certain limits of accuracy stated in the conditions of the offer. John had evidently divined some of the difficulties to be overcome when he recommended Harrison the test of the "gentle motion." We read, too, that he had himself sent a piece of his own manufacture to the proper quarter, and that "although the result did not fully answer his speculations, a sum of money was awarded to him for his ingenuity." Our last glimpse of John Gainsborough reveals him as an old man standing, by the hour together, drawing diagrams with a stick in the sand on the floor of his house at Sudbury. He determined finally that to prove his theories as to the proper method of reckoning longitude he must go to the East Indies, but he only got as far as London on that journey, where he died. Nearly every room of his house at Sudbury was full of unfinished models of brass and tin.

From what little is known of the second son, Humphrey, it seems clear that there was a strain of mechanical ability in the family, which in his case produced results more practical than in that of the unstable John. Humphrey was a Nonconformist minister in charge of a chapel or meeting-house at Henley-on-Thames, and his experiments in mechanics were the amusement of the leisure left by his duties as a minister—duties which were always conscientiously performed. It

is claimed for Humphrey Gainsborough that he invented the apparatus for condensing steam in a chamber separate from the cylinder of the then new invention of the steam engine, and that his invention was recognised and patented as his own by James Watt. Edgeworth, the father of the authoress, knew Humphrey well, and was a great believer in his ability. "I never knew a man of a more inventive mind," said he. The circumstances of his claim to the invention of the condenser are thus recorded by Fulcher:—"It was stated by his family and friends that Watt owed to him one of his great and fundamental improvements—that of condensing the steam in a separate vessel. Certain it is that Mr. Gainsborough had constructed a working model of a steam engine to which his discoveries were applied, and that a stranger, evidently well acquainted with mechanics and supposed to be connected with Watt as an engineer, was on a visit to Henley, to whom he unsuspectingly showed his model and explained its novelties. His relatives have assured the author that such was the fact, and that the circumstance of having thus lost the credit of the discovery made a deep and melancholy impression upon his mind."

The evidence is not conclusive, of course, but a passage in *Thicknesse* appears as a corroboration. "Mr. Gainsborough gave me, after the death of his clergyman brother, the model of his steam engine; that engine alone would have furnished a fortune to all the Gainsboroughs and their descendants, had not that unsuspicious good-hearted man let a cunning designing artist see it, who surreptitiously carried it off in his mind's eye." Watt took out his first patent for condensing in 1769, and renewed it in 1775. Humphrey Gainsborough died in 1776.

Humphrey left other evidence of his ability as an

inventor besides this claim to the invention of the condenser. He was, for example, an ingenious diallist, and Thicknesse mentions a sundial of his construction which would show the hour in any part of the world without the necessity of wheels and calculators usually fitted to such instruments. Thicknesse states that he presented this curious timepiece to the British Museum, where, however, it is certainly not displayed at the present moment. Humphrey, too, anticipated the modern fire-proof safe, and presented one of his boxes to a friend, in whose hands it received a very successful test. This gentleman's house was burned to the ground shortly afterwards, and the box and its contents recovered from the ruins uninjured. The Society of Arts, too, gave him a prize of £50 for a tide-mill. Altogether, one thinks of Humphrey as a notable man, who perhaps failed to find his proper vocation in the Independent Methodist Church. Portraits of both John and Humphrey by their brother Thomas were exhibited in the Grosvenor Gallery in 1885.

Of the other sons of old John Gainsborough we know that Matthias died untimely as a youth from an accident, and that Robert lived in Lancashire. Robert's calling is not mentioned, and we have no means of knowing whether he shared the family ability. Enterprise was not altogether lacking in his character: as Fulcher records, "it is current that he eloped with his first wife, was married twice, and had three children."

The daughters all married. Mary, the eldest, became the wife of a Dissenting minister at Bath named Gibbon, and the few letters of Thomas Gainsborough to his kinsfolk which have been preserved were written to this sister. Susan married a Mr. Gardiner, also of Bath, and her descendant, the Rev. Edward Gardiner, is the possessor of several portraits and etchings by the painter. The two other sisters, Sarah and Elizabeth, both lived and



died in their native town of Sudbury. Elizabeth married a Mr. Bird; Sarah, a Mr. Dupont. Sarah's son, Gainsborough Dupont, later became assistant to his uncle, and before his death at thirty years of age in 1797 achieved some success as a painter and engraver. He left several portraits of more or less notable personages of his day, including Mr. William Pitt, Lord Howe, and Robert Preston, who, in giving the great Minister periodical dinners at Greenwich, perhaps initiated the Ministerial whitebait dinner at the Ship, which has expired only in our own times. Dupont painted also Hector Rose, the Deputy Master of Trinity House in his day, and a portrait group of the Elder Brethren which still hangs in that building. He would probably, however, have been more notable as an engraver in mezzotinto than as a painter, had he lived. As it was, he left eleven excellent plates from works by his uncle—plates, in which, as Mr. Chaloner Smith points out, not only the manner but the very spirit of the painter is translated. One of the best known of these is that of the youthful St. Leger. It was that great authority's opinion, that, had Dupont attained his prime and continued the scraping of these admirable plates, his prints would have done much to have established the reputation of Gainsborough as the chief painter of English feminine grace and beauty in the place of Reynolds.

We have indicated the chief personal influences which may have helped to mould the character of Thomas Gainsborough—a good-natured and genial father, elder brothers of energy certainly, and of some practical ability in the mechanical sciences as known in their day, a tender mother, and four sisters older than himself. The commercial failure of his father when he was only six years of age seems to hint at straitened means in his family, but such disasters were more easily

repaired in a time when there was less struggle for existence than there is in these later days, and there is no hint of any breaking up of the family home; on the contrary, it is clear, from the following announcement in the *London Gazette* for October 16th of 1753, the year of the bankruptcy, that the commercial troubles of John Gainsborough were not long in settlement:—

“Whereas a Commission of Bankrupt was lately awarded and issued against John Gainsborough of Sudbury in the County of Suffolk clothier; this is to give notice that the said Commission is superseded under the Great Seal of Great Britain. Therefore all persons who are indebted to the said John Gainsborough, or have any effects in their hands, are forthwith to pay and deliver the same to the said John Gainsborough, or they will be sued by Mr. Henry Hanyford Attorney-at-Law, in Friday Street, London.”

The incident, however, is significant of the early necessity for each of the sons to choose a means of living, and that without much hope of any help that might come with a patrimony, however modest. That of Thomas was soon determined by his evident leaning towards graphic art.

Thomas is mentioned by one of his biographers as the only member of the family who was a charge upon the parental resources. The daughters were all married in due season. Humphrey was in his ministry, and the schemes of John doubtless provided in some way for the needs of that ingenious mechanic. But Thomas's years of dependence upon his father were certainly not prolonged beyond the ordinary, and his parents, like the sensible people they evidently were, had no hesitation in letting the boy follow his natural bent, which was not long in declaring itself. Among the few known facts of his boyhood, that of an early artistic precocity is very



BRAMFORD, NEAR IPSWICH





clearly established. Allan Cunningham has described him as having made some progress in sketching from nature at ten years old, and as being at twelve a confirmed painter. It seems certain that at a still earlier age his artistic tastes had attracted the notice of his parents and guardians. Fulcher tells us that, as soon as he had been placed under the ferule of his uncle Burroughs, who educated the Sudbury youth at the Grammar School, Tom was accustomed to employ the hours which should have been occupied with his grammar and sums in filling his books and those of his companions with the juvenile drawings with which genius so often declares itself. There was another boy named Joshua Reynolds engaged in so decorating Latin grammars at Plympton at much the same time. Young Tom Gainsborough is said to have had his own exercises done by his schoolfellows in exchange for his artistic productions, with the result that Uncle Burroughs was often completely deceived, and the young scapegrace provided with leisure to pursue his artistic essays unheeded and untroubled. Fulcher remembered the old schoolhouse, which was standing in 1855, and saw young Gainsborough's initials cut deep into the woodwork, as well as a caricature of the master, which may have been by the same hand. But the boy's ambitions were by no means bounded by such opportunities as lay within the four walls of the schoolhouse. There was no greater treat for the lad than to set off on a long summer day's ramble with his pencils and paper through the wooded country which lay around his native town. On one particular occasion he had applied for leave to make some such excursion from his uncle, and had been refused, when he hit on a means of escaping that disappointment. The boy returned with a paper bearing the words "Give Tom a holiday" in a very convincing imitation of his

father's handwriting, and bearing the parental signature. Fulcher relates that Burroughs was completely deceived, and allowed young Gainsborough the day for his sketching expedition; but having some later doubts on the point he communicated with old John, who was thus informed of the misapplied talents of his son. Upon being shown the forgery he exclaimed, "Tom will one day be hanged." The boy, however, brought back such a collection of sketches as the result of the day's truancy that the elder relented in his righteous anger, and, recognising the promise of his son's talent on the spot, "changed his mind, and with a father's pride declared, 'Tom will be a genius.'"

John Thomas Smith characteristically improves upon the story of the forgery. He declares that the family warming-pan was found full of orders for holidays forged in his father's name by the ingenious Tom.

These legends, however, true or false, half true or exaggerated, all present a general truth—the boy's love for nature and his diligence in its study. Gainsborough himself has left it on record that he sketched every tree, gate, stump, and stile within ten miles of his home until he knew every detail of that pleasant country by heart. All these products of his love he treasured up—"sketches of trees, rocks, shepherds, and pastoral scenes, drawn on slips of paper or on old dirty letters," as Thicknesse, to whom he gave a handful, describes them. That eccentric gentleman indeed laid claim to the first effort Gainsborough made with a pencil—a group of trees which he describes as "a wonderful performance, and not unworthy a place in one of the painter's best landscapes." We should imagine either the critical faculty of Mr. Thicknesse or his chronology to be at fault in this matter. More convincing is the information he has recorded, that the boy at first was careful to keep his

early sketches and studies, which he was accustomed to speak of as "his riding school," until his growing proficiency made him discontented with his juvenile efforts. Then he presented them broadcast to his friends, including Mr. Thicknesse and a lady in London, who rather unappreciatively papered a room with them.

We have examined, as fully as the scanty material available will allow, the personal surroundings in which young Gainsborough's character developed: in the case of an artist whose first love at least was the fervent admiration of landscape, a consideration of the physical surroundings in which that character developed is not less important. Fulcher goes out of his way to belittle the antique character of the Sudbury of Gainsborough's youth, and the boy's love of its quaintness: "The dilapidated and antique buildings which encumbered and disfigured the streets of his native town were, in the eyes of the painter, positive beauties. . . . Its then unpaved thoroughfares were at irregular intervals encroached upon by rude porches ornamented with carvings still more uncouth, antediluvian monsters and zoology-defying griffins whose antiquity was their only recommendation." But Mr. Fulcher wrote in the days when the artistic ideas which were crystallised in the Great Exhibition of 1851 were in full blast, and may be forgiven much. We may be thankful that Gainsborough's ideas in art had birth in different surroundings, and at this moment no apology is needed for his evident love for the mediæval character of his native town.

The house in which the Gainsborough family lived had been formerly an inn known as the Black Horse, and was one of those old-fashioned houses dating from the thirteenth century where the upper storeys overhung the lower. A local Act of 1825, which compelled the inhabitants to build houses which should be made

“perpendicular to the foundations thereof,” and no doubt began the changes which have quite transformed Sudbury, is the occasion of a mild joke by Mr. Fulcher. Sir Robert Peel, in discussing the disfranchisement of the borough, referred to this local Act “as a most extraordinary piece of legislation to compel people to build their houses upright! Mr. Fulcher opines that the great statesman’s thoughts were running more upon the bribery and corruption of the place than its overhanging storeys, and that he imagined these political backslidings of the people appeared even in the architecture of their houses.

Gainsborough’s house had a spacious and well-planted orchard at the back. Near the orchard stood the ruins of the palace of Simon Sudbury, Archbishop of Canterbury, the prelate who was unfortunately beheaded in 1375 by the rabble in Wat Tyler’s rebellion, and whose head may still be seen in good preservation in the adjacent church of St. Gregory.

Sudbury has increased since Gainsborough’s day to a town of seven thousand inhabitants, and it is perhaps vain to look for any great resemblance between its surroundings to-day and those of nearly two centuries ago. Yet there are broad natural features in that country which are unchangeable. There is the position of the county as the most easterly part of the kingdom, exposed to all the winds that come from that quarter, unsheltered by any considerable range of hills—conditions which make it at once the driest and the bleakest of the English counties. Its general flatness, the abundance of its waterways, and its cold and uncomfortable geological formation, give Suffolk a very distinct character of its own. All these features are permanent, and preserve, in many of its most striking aspects, the country in which young Gainsborough first ran about with his sketch-book. Thus the exposed nature of the country and the



absence of considerable hills result in a prodigality of the beauty of open sky and effects of atmosphere which certainly had their effect upon the boy, and influence much of his early landscape. The bleak nature of its plains and uplands, again, contrasts very markedly with the fertility of its river valleys.

Sudbury lies in the upper part of one of the chief of these valleys—that of the Stour, the river which divides Suffolk from Essex, and at the highest navigable point of the river. At Sudbury begins that extensive area of cold clay which stretches unbroken for some twenty-five miles to Ipswich—a soil capable of growing prodigious crops of wheat under good management in dry seasons, but normally cold and inhospitable to live upon. Near the town itself, however, the clay softens into the alluvial soil of the river valley with its accompaniment of willow, alder, and elm in the woodlands, and of pasture with luxuriant hedgerow instead of tilled arable in the fields. The natural features of the Stour valley twenty miles farther down the river are familiar to most Englishmen in the paintings of Constable. But the scenery changes much for the better before Dedham is reached, and in the neighbourhood of Sudbury we look in vain for the fertility and graciousness of the pastoral country which that artist painted so convincingly.

Nevertheless, Sudbury stands in a rural and green environment to-day, and it is certain that its charm in that respect was at least as striking in Gainsborough's youth. We may indeed recognise the main features of the Sudbury country of to-day in one or two of his early paintings, which we shall examine in detail a little later. Great Cornard, which gives its name to the chief of these, is a village within a couple of miles of his birthplace, and its woodland, overlooking the tamer lower ground of the river valley, indicates pretty clearly the character of the

surroundings from which he drew his boyish inspiration in landscape—a character which is recognisable in the same country to-day.

East Anglia shares with another flat country, Holland, some inscrutable quality which has made both the place of origin of many considerable artists. Gainsborough himself, Crome, Cotman, Constable, are all great names in English landscape painting, and they all were reared in Norfolk or Suffolk. To these names we may add that of Charles Keene, who, though born elsewhere, was educated and spent much of his youth at Ipswich, and turned constantly to the Suffolk fields and its peasants for the inspirations of many of his finest works. These men together give East Anglia a distinction among English counties as a nursery of British art.

One other natural feature of Suffolk may have had an indirect bearing on young Gainsborough's artistic development—the abundance of its natural waterways. It is computed by local topographers, that even in our day, when inland navigation is under a cloud, Suffolk, with a single artificial canal, has no spot within its borders which is more than ten miles from a navigable stream. In Gainsborough's boyhood, before the development of the coach and cross country roads, this facility of intercommunication was of great value to the development of the county, and especially brought the county generally into commercial contact with the countries dealing by sea with its coast towns. The chief of these was Holland. It is quite conceivable that with other merchandise from the Low Countries came, and remained in Suffolk, many specimens of the Dutch and Flemish schools of painting, which have in our own day gone further afield. Very strong traces of the influence of some of the Dutch artists are to be found in almost

all Gainsborough's early landscapes. No one has ever explained how he came under the influence of these artists, or has identified as existing in his day in Suffolk any considerable collection of such works to which he could have had access. It seems quite probable, therefore, that the barge-laden rivers of his native county brought many specimens of the work of some of the lesser Dutch artists to the villages about which he roamed, and so brought that foreign influence to bear, which we shall recognise when we come to consider his early work in detail.

In these surroundings, then, were awakened that love of nature and the power of interpretation of its beauties which were presently to entitle Gainsborough to the distinction of being the first of the long line of great painters of landscape in England who drew their inspiration from the study of nature in the open air. As we shall see hereafter, neither his limitations in landscape nor the claims of Richard Wilson affect his rights to that distinction.

The boy, however, was soon to give an indication at least of his future power as a painter of portraits, which may have had some weight in determining the trend of his future artistic career. There is a pleasant story repeated with little variation by all his early biographers, which presents the zealous Tom sitting at sunrise in a bush or arbour in his father's orchard, sketching an old tree which had taken his fancy. To him entered unobserved a local *vaurien*, who gazed wistfully at old Gainsborough's pears hanging ripe in the orchard—pears which had already suffered depredation by some unknown hand. "The slanting light of the sun," says Cunningham, "happened to throw the eager face into a highly picturesque mixture of light and shade, and Tom immediately sketched his likeness."

The boy showed himself just as the man had decided to climb the fence of the orchard. He went in to breakfast and produced the drawing, much to the delight of old Gainsborough. The latter recognised a well-known character of the neighbourhood, whom he sent for and taxed with the loss of his fruit. The culprit denied his guilt until he was confronted with the sketch, when he confessed.

From this sketch Gainsborough painted a recognisable portrait of the man, whom he called Tom Peartree, which he mounted upon a shaped board in the manner of the old Dutch fire-screens, which are now again in such vogue. This portrait he is said to have stuck up in the orchard, where it presented so natural an appearance as to deceive the local rustics. This effigy of Tom Peartree appeared at the exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1885, and Gainsborough often referred to its origin with much relish in his later years.

Cunningham, writing in 1829, declared that at that time the memory of these early days of Gainsborough was still strong in Suffolk, but there appears to be some reason for doubting the accuracy of his remark. "A beautiful wood four miles in extent," he says, "is shown, whose ancient trees, winding glades, and sunny nooks inspired him while he was but a schoolboy with the love of art. Scenes are pointed out where he used to sit and fill his copy-books with pencillings of flowers and trees and whatever pleased his fancy, and it is said that these early attempts of the child bore a distinct resemblance to the mature works of the man."

Our reason for doubting the great enthusiasm of the Suffolk folk for the memory of Gainsborough in 1829 is, that thirty years earlier the researches of other ardent inquirers in the same district failed to discover any particulars worth mentioning of his life or work. John



Thomas Smith, wishing to collect material for a life of the painter in 1797, wrote to John Constable, at that time settled at Bergholt, asking his aid in the matter. Constable replied:

EAST BERTHOLT, 7th May 1797.

"DEAR FRIEND SMITH,—If you remember, in my last I promised to write again soon and tell you what I could about Gainsborough. I hope you will not think me negligent when I inform you that I have not been able to learn anything of consequence respecting him. I can assure you that it is not for want of asking that I have not been successful, for indeed I have talked with those who knew him. I believe in Ipswich they did not know his value until they had lost him. . . .

"I shall now give you a few lines *verbatim* which my friend Dr. Hamilton, of Ipswich, was good enough to send me.

"‘I have not been neglectful of the inquiries respecting Gainsborough, but have learned nothing worth your notice. There is no vale or grove distinguished by his name in the neighbourhood. There is a place up the river-side where he often sat to sketch on account of the beauty of the landscape, its extensiveness and richness in variety both in the fore and back grounds. It comprehended Bramford and other distant villages on one side, and on the other side of the river extended towards Nacton, etc. Freston alehouse must have been near, for it appears he has introduced the Boot signpost in many of his best pictures.’

"This, my dear friend, is the little all I have yet gained, but, though I have been unsuccessful, it does not follow that I should relinquish my inquiries. If you want to know the exact time of his birth, I will take a ride over to Sudbury, and look into the Register. There

is one exceeding fine picture of his painting at Mr. Kilderby's, in Ipswich.—Thine sincerely,

“JOHN CONSTABLE.”

This letter adds nothing at all to our knowledge of Gainsborough's youth, and there is unfortunately no record of any further inquiry by Constable or others which, at a date so near to his death, might with good fortune have been more successful.

Gainsborough's early biographers all agree that the boy's obvious talent for drawing made the choice of a profession an easy one for his parents and guardians. Fulcher says that consultations were held, opinions canvassed, and the sense of the little community of Sudbury taken upon that important subject. We read that the Rev. Mr. Burroughs pronounced his blessing upon the youth and upon the decision of his family to send him to London at the age of fourteen, to proceed with his artistic education. Although there is again a lamentable dearth of precise information about this important part of the boy's career, there is no doubt whatever that he left Sudbury for London in the year 1741.

It is not at all clear who received the youth, or in what part of the town he lived. A writer of his obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for August 1788 states that “the person at whose house he principally resided was a silversmith of some taste, and from him Gainsborough was ever ready to confess that he had received great assistance.” Charles Grignon, the engraver, is the authority given for this statement, which he imparted to Mr. Edwards, of the *Anecdotes of Painters*, in whose work it is embalmed. We are not told, however, whether the boy went to the silversmith in the capacity of lodger only, or, like Hogarth at Mr. Gamble's,

to learn the mysteries of the art of chasing on metals. Some colour is given to the latter supposition by the established fact that Gainsborough at some time of his career acquired a knowledge of etching, as shown by certain impressions from his plates still in the possession of a descendant of his sister, the Rev. E. Gardiner. Some others are mentioned by Fulcher, who states that they were chiefly on pewter, or in the soft ground method on copper, a method which reproduces the touch of the crayon with great accuracy.

We next hear of the boy as the assistant of Hubert Gravelot, the French designer, book illustrator and engraver, at that time practising in England. Fulcher supposes that the unnamed silversmith introduced him to Gravelot, though, as we shall see, there were other opportunities for the boy to meet that artist. Gravelot's career in England has been recorded for the first time (for English readers at least) by Sir Walter Armstrong in a most interesting passage drawn from authoritative records of Hubert by his own brother, and the researches of such authorities as the brothers Goncourt. From this we learn that Charles Grignon was Gravelot's pupil; also that Gravelot combined with his other work the teaching or overlooking of the students at one of the artists' clubs or drawing schools, which were the only organised schools of art in London before the establishment of the Royal Academy. Fulcher says that Gravelot himself introduced the boy to the school in St. Martin's Lane. In any case, it seems certain that Gainsborough was two years under Gravelot, and that he was also admitted to the school.

We have little more than supposition to aid us in determining the nature of Gainsborough's occupation with Gravelot or of his relations with that artist. Another of the obituary writers who noticed the painter's death in the *European Magazine* in 1788 states that

"under Gravelot's instructions he drew most of the ornaments which decorate the illustrious heads so admirably engraved by Houbraken." These heads were drawn in England and sent over to Holland to be transferred to the copper by Houbraken, and we learn from the same source that it was the custom of the ingenious publisher, Mr. Knapton, to set boys to copy these heads from unknown portraits, and upon the return of the plate from Houbraken to dignify them with the most illustrious names. It is quite probable, therefore, that young Gainsborough may have been one of the boys so employed.

It has been suggested that Gravelot's influence upon Gainsborough appears very plainly in some of the studies in crayon left behind by the painter, which are held greatly to resemble drawings in the same medium by the Frenchman. The present writer confesses that he finds little similarity in such drawings by the two artists as are available for comparison at the Print Room of the British Museum. Two chalk drawings of male figures by Hubert Gravelot to be seen there are much less free in handling than a typical chalk study by Gainsborough, and display more work with the finger and stump. The single lady, too, by Gravelot is even more tight in handling. Compared with the study for the portrait of Lady Clarges, or with that of the women seated at the table which we reproduce, or indeed with any of the Gainsborough drawings in the National Collection, they have little in common except the material in which they are executed.

It may be, however, that other drawings of Gravelot bear a more convincing resemblance to Gainsborough's work, but even then appears this difficulty, that nearly all Gainsborough's existing drawings were made at a date twenty years after his acquaintance with the Frenchman. Sir Walter Armstrong suggests with plausibility





STUDY IN CHALK



that the resemblance he discovers is one of those interesting cases of "throwing back" by an artist to the experience gathered at an impressionable age—a parallel case, in fact, to that of Reynolds, who at one or two rare intervals during his later career betrayed in his work some of the crudities of his first master, Hudson. This seems the more plausible theory. Another is that Gainsborough and his old master may have had some unrecorded intercourse in later years, when the elder man exerted some influence upon the younger, which appears in the similarity of their methods with the crayon.

According to Fulcher, Gravelot about this time was engaged upon the illustration of Sir Thomas Hanmer's edition of Shakespeare, which was published in 1744, and was associated with Francis Hayman in that work. Here, no doubt, was the beginning of that connection which ended in young Gainsborough's leaving Gravelot in 1743 and going into Hayman's studio as pupil or assistant.

Francis Hayman, who at this time was thirty-five years of age, is little remembered as a painter to-day. He had a certain vogue in his own, however, and was one of the most notable of the young men who followed the traditions of the school of Hogarth. His first master was Brown, the pupil of Thornhill, who saved that painter's life by flinging a loaded brush at the painting upon which he was engaged in the dome of St. Paul's, and, in so arresting his attention, prevented him from walking backward over the edge of the scaffolding. Hayman began life as a scene painter at Drury Lane; later he became a book illustrator, in which capacity he produced some passable designs for *Don Quixote* and other works. He painted occasional portraits, and specimens of this branch of his art may be seen in the National Portrait Gallery, where are presentations of

himself and of Sir Robert Walpole. There is a picture of his in the grand style at the Foundling Hospital, very reminiscent of Hogarth's work, "Moses brought to Pharaoh's Daughter," in the same manner. Occasionally he painted incidents of the life of his day in a clean and unpretending style, as in the famous "Cricket Players," now in the pavilion at Lord's. About the time Gainsborough joined him Hayman was very busy at Vauxhall Gardens, where he was decorating Jonathan Tyers's supper boxes with panels in the style of Hogarth's scenes of English life. Hogarth, indeed, to oblige his friend Tyers, lent his "Four Times of the Day" for the purpose of being copied by Hayman. Hayman's own productions were incidents of well-known comedies, scenes from popular ballads, or designs presenting the pastimes of that day—"The Play of Cricket," "The Play of Leapfrog," "The Maypole," and what not. Many of these rather clumsy designs may be recognised in the rough mezzotints of such subjects published by the Bowles family in their long series of "humorous mezzotintos."

It is claimed for Francis Hayman, that, with all his limitations as a creative artist, he was at least a thoroughly sound painter, and consequently young Gainsborough could have gone to no better master in order to learn the technical part of his art. It was with Hayman, doubtless, that the boy acquired that sound method of painting which, so far as the mere manipulation of material is concerned, has left him without a rival among modern artists.

Apart altogether from Gravelot, Gainsborough would have a point of contact with Hayman in the drawing school in St. Martin's Lane. This was one of the associations of artists which preceded the foundation of the Royal Academy, and may in some sort be con-



sidered the parents of that august body. As early as 1711 a sort of incipient academy was formed by a band of artists, with Kneller at their head; ten years later another set of men surrounded Thornhill at his house in the Piazza in Covent Garden, to draw from the life. A little later still, George Michael Moser, the chaser and enamellist, presided over a similar institution held at the house of a Mr. Peter Hyde, in Greyhound Court. This society included most of the artists practising in London in those days, and in 1739 removed to St. Peter's Court, at the back of St. Martin's Lane. Hayman was living at this time in that street, in the same house that Reynolds afterwards occupied for a couple of years upon setting up in London in 1753. At the back of the house was a detached room, where Roubilliac modelled many of the pieces of sculpture by which he is known. In this room the artists were accustomed to meet of an evening to draw from the life and from the cast. A collection of these casts, formerly in the possession of Sir James Thornhill, was presented to the society by his son-in-law Hogarth, who, however, held the institution in little favour, as calculated to turn out artists at too cheap a rate. This society eventually grew into the Incorporated Society of Artists, which again after some convulsions produced the Royal Academy, in whose schools, as a proof of their pedigree, Mr. Hogarth's identical casts may be seen to this day. Hayman was a very active member of the Incorporated Society in the days which preceded the formation of the Academy, and was recognised by his fellow professionals as an energetic and forcible personality in the many stormy conferences of those times.

We may take note of these qualities in Hayman's character, not as of any intrinsic importance in themselves, but because it is almost certain that the youthful

Gainsborough, in his first taste of life, drank at the same cup with Francis Hayman. Francis was a roaring hearty blade, fond of his pipe and glass, always ready to beat the town, or the watch for that matter, and a very perfect guide to the pleasures of the town which were painted so convincingly by Mr. Hogarth. No one knew the humours of Covent Garden better than Francis.

He was with Hogarth at a low house in that quarter when that painter drew his attention to the incident of one young woman squirting wine into the face of the other—an incident which amused the great man hugely, and was afterwards depicted very convincingly in one of the best known of his works. We get frequent glimpses of Francis and his social accomplishments in the raffish memoirs of those times. He was the inseparable companion of James Quin, the actor, and the pair shared very regularly some of the surprising amusements of the town which so many notable men found attractive in those days. We read, for example, how he lay drunk with Mr. Quin in the gutter, and begged that gentleman not to get up because the watch would presently take them both up. Hayman was an ardent votary of the prize-ring too, an institution at this moment coming into great favour under the distinguished auspices of the Duke of Cumberland, and with the eminent Jack Broughton as its pillar and chief ornament. Angelo tells a story of Francis in his painting-room, of the bluff Granby entering and insisting on a set-to with the painter with the gloves, or mufflers as they were called—instruments but lately invented by the ingenious Broughton, which made the practice of the manly art of self-defence possible for such distinguished amateurs. Hayman pleaded gout. "I have gout," said the Marquess; "we are about the same age, and a fair match." The house began to shake as in a hurricane,

and the affrighted Mrs. Hayman rushed up to the studio to find Francis and the Marquess punching each other's heads like a pair of draymen.

With this hearty spirit as mentor young Gainsborough spent two years, and without any details of his life during that time we may supply particulars just as our imagination or our knowledge of the period dictates. London in 1743 was a pleasant place. England was then nearing the end of that long period of rest which had been provided for it after the strife of the Stuarts by the sagacious Walpole—a period during which Englishmen had been left to conduct their own affairs in their own way, and had learned to labour daily and to lay the foundations of the great commercial community that England later became. Londoners, above all, learned to enjoy themselves. We may see almost all the diversions of London in their origin in those early years, and others which have happily gone out of fashion. You may trace most of the present variety performances of the music halls to the entertainments which were provided for generations of citizens at one or other of the great fairs—Bartholomew's in Smithfield, or Southwark Fair, or the gatherings which gave its name to that prim locality we now know as Mayfair. The modern pantomime originated in the same surroundings. For the heartier sort, of which Francis Hayman was a member, there were the now extinct delights of the bull-baiting at Hockley in the Hole, of the main of cocks at Gray's Inn Lane or Westminster, or the knock-out between Slack and Broughton at the amphitheatre in the Haymarket. Hayman certainly watched the beginnings of the great modern game of cricket when he painted the group we have mentioned at their play at White Conduit Fields, where met the primitive society which included Mr. Thomas Lord, the founder of the Marylebone Club, among

its members. Modern popular oratorio, and the love of Londoners for good music, had their origin in the same times. The London of George the Second and of George the Third was, above all, a town of musical harmony. The groves of Vauxhall Gardens, of Marylebone, and of a score of less pretentious places of amusement where the sober citizens of those days took their solace after the day's work, resounded with the best of music played and sung by the best of performers. In one or the other you might meet the great Mr. Handel listening to the first performance of one of his cantatas; later, Arne would himself lead the fiddlers, while some tuneful lady trilled "Where the Bee Sucks," or "Blow, blow, thou Winter Wind." The whole town, indeed, for three generations was mellifluous with the warblings of such voices as Miss Falkner, or Lowe the tenor, or Nan Catley, or Mrs. Weichsel. We take particular note of this musical quality of the entertainments of the London in which young Gainsborough found himself, because later he developed a very strong taste for music, which became a great solace for his middle and later years. We have no doubt whatever that the taste was first acquired in the company of Francis Hayman at one or other of the *al fresco* concerts of those years—notably perhaps at Vauxhall, where Frank would do the honours. We have little doubt either that the boy shared with Hayman other less innocent diversions of the town.

If all this speculation upon little known fact seem irrelevant, let it be remembered that Gainsborough's true personality and character present some contradictions which it is not easy to explain. He painted women with a delicacy seldom equalled in the history of art, and never surpassed: in anything we know that came from his pencil there is no hint of coarseness. He was eminently a painter of refinement, who threw



the glamour of beauty and romance over even the homely figures of the peasants he placed in his landscape. On the other hand, there are few among his known letters which are not disfigured by expressions which would rank as indecent even in the times in which he lived. His habit of cursing, which appears on almost every page that he wrote, was hardly acquired in the company of his Nonconformist parents and the society of his sisters before his fifteenth year. We attribute, then, the refinement which appeared in his work to the early influences of his boyhood, and the coarseness and gift of tongues and other less reputable accomplishments, to which he alludes in one of his letters, to his association with Francis Hayman.

This is of course a speculation on our part, as it has been on that of others. Cunningham, for a wonder, is neutral in the matter. Fulcher is not on the side of the angels. "Whatever knowledge was questionable in his after-conduct," says he, "must in a great measure be attributable to his early removal from home influence and to Hayman's example. Whatever knowledge he acquired in his art beyond its elements, was gained from other instructors than Hayman, and elsewhere than at the academy in St. Martin's Lane." Sir Walter Armstrong is of the same opinion as to the moral effects of his contact with Hayman. Mrs. Bell, however, with the charity which one expects from a lady, differs from all his male biographers. "No one," says this lady, "who looks at the portrait of himself, supposed to have been painted not long after his return home, which was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1885, could read in the bright innocent features and the honest eyes any of those signs which the indulgence in vice too surely leaves."

Of young Gainsborough's occupation in London next

to nothing is known. Fulcher says, with very little authority, that, young as he was, "he could not fail to see the incompetency of the artists by whom he was surrounded. Three years spent among the works of the painters in St. Martin's Lane were not, however, without their influence upon his own productions, and it is not to be wondered at that "his early portraits have little to recommend them." This is but the echo of an obituary notice in the *European Magazine* of 1788, the writer of which indeed makes use of the very words. We have little means of judging Gainsborough's ability at this moment, though perhaps the scribe of 1788 was better situated. But the boy of sixteen or seventeen had certainly done nothing as yet to justify the assumption of airs of superiority to Hayman and the other artists of that day, as Mr. Fulcher suggests. There are in the National Gallery of Ireland two pencil drawings by the painter, signed "Tho. Gainsborough fecit, 1743-44," which Sir Walter Armstrong accepts as his work without any doubt whatever, and which suggest his progress as an artist at this period. These present the three-quarter length figures of a citizen and his wife, both of a very solid aspect, the man stiffly posed, and the drawing careful and laborious in handling. They are, nevertheless, manifestly by an able if youthful hand, and suggest very successfully the character of the sitters—honest burghesses who lived over their shops all the week, and took their modest pleasure at Bagnigge Wells or Islington Spa on Sundays. They may quite possibly represent Gainsborough's landlord and his lady, and they are a valuable index of the extent of Gainsborough's equipment as a portrait painter at the end of his stay in London.

It was with this equipment that the boy, after some three years of study with Gravelot, Hayman, and the drawing schools, determined to tempt fortune as a painter



MRS. GAGE AND CHILD





of portraits. "He hired rooms in Hatton Garden," says Fulcher, "where he commenced painting landscapes and portraits of a small size. The former he sold to picture dealers on their own terms."

Smith records a conversation between Nollekens and Panton Betew, an old silversmith and picture dealer which has an interest as one of the few recorded anecdotes bearing upon Gainsborough's practice at this time:—

"Well, and there was your great Mr. Gainsborough. I have had many and many a drawing of his in my shop window before he went to Bath, and he has often been glad to receive seven or eight shillings for what I have sold. Paul Sandby knows it well."

For portraits, his price was from three to five guineas. This was the recognised market price for the works of beginners at this time, and was the fee named by young Reynolds at Plymouth to his sitters. But few sitters, we are afraid, found their way to those hired rooms in Hatton Garden. We read of the young painter taking to modelling as a means of filling up the time on his hands, and of his attaining a certain excellence in the figures of cows, dogs, and horses. "A cast in the plaster shops of an old horse that he modelled had peculiar merit," said the *European Magazine*, and work of this kind was probably the chief product of those unemployed days in Hatton Garden. However this may have been, young Gainsborough had seen enough of life in London to convince him there was at present no great income awaiting him there as a portrait painter, and in 1745, at the age of eighteen, he turned his back on the town and again sought his native Suffolk.

## CHAPTER II

### SUFFOLK—1745-1759

UPON his return to Sudbury, it is certain that young Gainsborough turned to his first love—the study of nature and the painting of landscape. His experience in London as a portrait painter had not been so profitable as to make his return to the fields and woods of Suffolk any great sacrifice, and the patronage which had failed him in Hatton Garden was unlikely to be forthcoming among the yeomen of Sudbury. We have it from Fulcher that “he now began to study landscape where only faultless painting can be found, in the fields and woods. The Suffolk ploughmen often saw him in the early morning, sketch-book in hand, brushing with hasty steps the dew away, and lingering in the golden light of evening, taking lessons from the sunset clouds in changeful beauty,” as Mr. Fulcher poetically observes. More convincing evidence perhaps of the boy’s occupation is the work he left which is known to be of this period.

The earliest of his known pictures is the canvas in the possession of Mr. J. D. Cobbold, which is certainly a landscape, but has little of nature in it; and if Gainsborough’s early sketches were all we have been told, it shows a grievous relapse in his progress as a landscape painter since those early productions which inspired Thicknesse and some others with such enthusiasm.

Here, in fact, is the impossible Dutch landscape which one sees on tables and Dutch clock faces—more soundly painted, of course, but in essence the same. There is an impossible rock on the right of the spectator, which must have fallen down of its own ill construction without the weight of the impossible village on top of it. Impossible lakes or rivers, it is not certain which, occupy the foreground and middle distance, bounded by impossible mountains and impossible plains. Even the architecture is impossible. There are square cottages joined to round ruined towers by impossible junctures, all indeed in the formula of the impossible Dutch pictures of the hand-screen order. The only natural objects appear in the cows, sheep, and figures with which the piece is dotted, and in the trees, which, if conventional in idea and mannered in execution, have indeed some semblance of life.

The picture is obviously the work of a young artist whose ideas had been influenced by some very mediocre Dutchman, and must have been painted by Gainsborough soon after his return to Suffolk from London. Sir Walter Armstrong suggests that Wilson's influence may have been at work and borne fruit in this canvas. That painter would certainly have met Gainsborough in London, either at the school or with Hayman, whose close acquaintance he was. Gainsborough doubtless had opportunities of seeing Wilson's work in London: early works of each, indeed, hang side by side to-day at the Foundling Hospital. The difficulty is to believe that Wilson ever painted anything so abjectly naïve as the composition which served as a model for Mr. Cobbold's picture.

This picture, however, is so apart from everything else which is known to have come from the artist's pencil, that we may leave it in a category of its own, and

turn to what is known of the details of the young painter's life upon his return to Suffolk.

Gainsborough at the early age of nineteen met with the great good fortune of a happy marriage. The young girl he made his wife was surrounded by all the romantic interest which attaches to great beauty and mysterious birth; she brought, too, the very solid advantage to a young and struggling painter of an annuity of two hundred a year. We are introduced to this lady in characteristic fashion by Allan Cunningham.

"It happened in one of his pictorial excursions among the woods of Suffolk that he sat down to make a sketch of some fine trees, with sheep reposing below and wood doves roosting above, when a young woman entered unexpectedly upon the scene, and was at once admitted into the landscape and the feelings of the artist. The name of this young lady was Margaret Burr; she was of Scottish extraction and in her sixteenth year, and to the charms of good sense and good looks was added a clear annuity of two hundred pounds. These are matters which no writer of romance could overlook, and were accordingly felt by a young and ardent and susceptible man. Nor must I omit to add that country rumour conferred other attractions. She was said to be the natural daughter of one of our exiled princes, nor was she, when a wife and a mother, desirous of having this circumstance forgotten. On one occasion of household festivity, when her husband was high in fame, she vindicated some little ostentation in her dress by whispering to her niece, 'For you know, my love, I am a prince's daughter.'"

With this somewhat high-strung passage we may collate Mr. Fulcher's more sober account of Mrs. Gainsborough.

"The young lady's name was Margaret Burr; her



brother, as we have observed, was a commercial traveller in the establishment of Gainsborough's father, and this as a matter of course led to an acquaintance with the family. The memory of Miss Burr's extraordinary beauty is still preserved in Sudbury, and that a beautiful girl should wish to have her portrait painted by her brother's young friend naturally followed as cause and effect. The sittings were numerous and protracted, but the likeness was at last finished."

All the existing portraits of Gainsborough suggest as well favoured a gallant as could be wished. "He was handsome, of a fair complexion, regular features, tall, well proportioned. His forehead, though not high, was broad and strongly marked, his nose Roman, his mouth and eye denoting humour and refinement; the general expression of his face thoughtful, though not altogether pleasant. The most casual observer must have seen that much lay there; one gifted with greater insight would have said also that something was wanting, though few would have affirmed what."

Such is Mr. Fulcher's portrait of Gainsborough, a portrait drawn from the painter's own representations of himself, for it is certain that the tradition of his personal appearance had expired before Fulcher's day. There is no doubt that young Gainsborough was an attractive and personable youth, and he may have brought back graces from the great outside world of London which did not diminish his attractions for the country maid. But Fulcher goes beyond his brief when he hints, without any authority that we can discover, that the lady began the courting. "The young lady," says he, "expressed her warm admiration of the painter's skill, and in doing so gave him the gentlest possible hint that perhaps in time he might become the possessor of the original."

To complete the record of this interesting young

woman we may quote Governor Thicknesse's description, observing also that she was never fortunate enough to gain that gentleman's approbation. According to the Governor, Mrs. Gainsborough was "a pretty Scots girl of low birth, who by the luck of the day had an annuity settled upon her of two hundred pounds. No reflection is meant here on Mrs. Gainsborough's virtue," he explains in a note.

That same annuity and its source were the cause of many surmises as to Mrs. Gainsborough's origin. Gainsborough's own daughters told an informant of Fulcher that they did not know anything about it, but that the money was regularly transmitted through a London bank, which, after all, was the important point. The good lady apparently thought herself of royal origin. On the other hand, a local gentleman, "the late Mr. Thomas Green, of Ipswich," has the following entry in his "Diary of a Lover of Literature," under date of April 22nd, 1818: "Much chat with Mrs. Dupuis respecting Gainsborough, who lived here on the site which Mr. Tunney's house now occupies. Very lively, gay and dissipated. His wife, Margaret, natural daughter of the Duke of Bedford. Rapid in painting, his creations sudden."

In support of Mr. Green's confident assertion, those who remember the exhibition of Gainsborough's work in the Grosvenor Gallery in 1885 declare that there was a recognisable likeness between the portraits of the lady and of John seventh Duke of Bedford, which were there placed side by side. If that nobleman were indeed her father, there is some little difficulty about dates which would point to a certain precocity on the part of the Duke. The lady is represented as of seventeen years of age at her marriage, in 1745. She must thus have been born in 1728 at the latest, and in that year his Grace

was eighteen. The matter is but slightly improved by shifting the paternity upon his eldest brother Wriothsesley, who would have been twenty-one on the appearance of Miss Burr in the world. It is true that one of Gainsborough's letters written much later to this Duke suggests a degree of familiarity between himself and his patron not common in those days between men so divided in rank. But the matter is and must remain obscure, and perhaps the good lady's claim to royal origin is quite as plausible. One thing is certain: the annuity of two hundred a year, a comfortable sum to a man in Gainsborough's position, was regularly paid.

The young couple returned at first to the parental home. Fulcher tells us that when they were expected from their honeymoon an old servant of John Gainsborough's was sent to meet them, and that the father-in-law was much struck with the beauty of the bride. He announced to all and sundry as his opinion that "Master Tommy's wife was handsomer than Madame Kidington," then the belle of the Sudbury neighbourhood. The young couple, however, were not long in setting up an establishment of their own, however modest. This was at first in Friar Street, Sudbury, where they could have remained but a short time, for six months after their marriage they took a house in Brook Street, Ipswich, the rent of which, six pounds a year according to Fulcher, suggests a menage upon a reasonably economical scale.

This move to Ipswich provided Gainsborough with a new country for the study of landscape. He was now to come under the spell of that land between Stour and Orwell which so fascinated Constable a generation later, and, through the medium of that painter's artistic personality, was destined to lead to the transformation of all standards and conceptions of landscape art. Ipswich is some twenty-two miles east of Sudbury, but the

contrast between the peninsula between the two rivers and the upper valley of the Stour is not to be measured by the few miles of the map. The estuary of the Orwell itself is still one of the most beautiful pieces of tidal water in England, and the opalescent colour of its atmospheric effects, the red sails of its barges, and the beauty of its shores, to-day make a picture which has certainly not improved since Gainsborough's time. Ipswich has grown into a large city of nearly seventy thousand inhabitants, with the squalor and destruction of natural beauty in its surroundings which, by a really unnecessary fate, accompany all growths of population in this country. But we may still be thankful that so much of the country of Gainsborough and of Constable is yet unspoiled, and that that country to-day remains in many essentials the same country that young Gainsborough set himself to paint upon settling down at Ipswich after his marriage.

Gainsborough, secured against want by his wife's modest fortune, now contemplated the relatively humdrum career of the local artist. His love of natural beauty drew him to the open-air branch of his profession, though his short experience as a portrait painter in London had no doubt given him enough confidence to undertake such commissions in portraiture as Ipswich was likely to afford. Ipswich was the county town, and, as such, a more promising field for a painter seeking patrons than the obscure Sudbury. The painter probably looked for employment in painting those quaint elevations of country houses which were in such request by the squires of that day, judging by the numbers which have survived, and were so typical of the work of the local artists who preceded him. These he might reasonably hope to improve upon with his love and knowledge of nature. It is certain that at present he





PRINCE AUGUSTUS FREDERICK



had no very exalted ideas of his own abilities, and probable that the painting of the squires' hounds and horses would not have been despised.

Fulcher tells a story of this period which may or may not have a basis of truth.

"One wealthy squire in the vicinity having heard that Gainsborough, the painter, was at Ipswich, sent one of his servants with a message that he desired to speak with him. Gainsborough attended the summons in the squire's parlour. The latter then led the way through a window leading to the lawn, requesting the painter to follow him, who not unreasonably thought that his patron wished to point out some view he wished to have taken as a subject for a picture. He listened to what seemed a rambling calculation as to the dimensions of the doors and windows, the number of palings and the house, the broken panes in the garrets and hothouses, till the squire, turning to Gainsborough, requested his estimate for repairing the whole. He had indeed taken the young artist for a painter-glazier. A look of scorn at the squire concluded the scene, and, turning on his heel, Gainsborough left him to discover his error."

Fulcher declares, though it must be mere surmise, that commissions at this time were so few that "Gainsborough had ample opportunity to gratify his love of nature." He made that opportunity, we may be sure; but whether he found his account in the process no one at present can tell, except, as Sir Walter Armstrong points out, as the result of identifying his earlier work, an occupation not without interest for leisured amateurs. Fulcher goes on to remark that he "carried his palette into the open air," which is again most probable and nothing in the shape of a revelation. More interesting are the particulars he gives us of Gainsborough's studies in water colour at this period.

“Mr. Edgar, of the Red House, Ipswich, is in possession of several admirable water-colour drawings executed by Gainsborough at this period, and given by him to one of his ancestors. It may be mentioned, as tending to show how carefully the painter prepared his studies, notwithstanding their apparent lack of elaboration, that the object of two of these drawings is simply to illustrate the effect of sunbeams piercing through the clouds in opposite directions.” Gainsborough, in fact, was resuming the practice of his boyhood of recording such natural facts as struck him.

It was at this period that that quaint figure of Philip Thicknesse comes into the history of the life of the painter. Thicknesse himself conceived a rather grand idea of his own influence upon the fortunes of the painter, which may or may not be exaggerated; but there is little doubt that the acquaintance of the pair had a quickening effect upon the early career of young Gainsborough, and Thicknesse's personality is so quaint and picturesque that the connection claims particular notice, at this period of our inquiry at least.

The manner of the introduction, which came about through the means of our old friend Tom Peartree, is best told in Thicknesse's own words:—

“Soon after his remove to Ipswich I was appointed Lieutenant-Governor to Landguard Fort, not far distant, and, while I was walking with the then printer and editor of the *Ipswich Journal* in a very pretty town garden of his, I perceived a melancholy-faced countryman with his arms locked together leaning over the garden wall. I pointed him out to the printer, who was a very ingenious man, and he with great gravity of face said the man had been there all day, that he pitied him, believing he was either mad or miserable. I then stepped forward with an intention to speak to the madman, and did not



perceive, until I was close up, that it was a wooden man painted upon a shaped board. Mr. Creighton—I think that was the printer's name—told me I had not been the only person this inimitable deception had imposed upon, for that many of his acquaintance had been led even to speak to it before they had perceived it to be a piece of art; and, upon finding the artist himself lived in that town, I immediately procured his address, visited Mr. Gainsborough, and told him I came to chide him for having imposed a shadow instead of a substance upon me. Mr. Gainsborough received me in his painting-room, in which stood several portraits truly drawn, perfectly like, but stiffly painted and worse coloured, among which was the late Admiral Vernon's, for it was not many years after he had taken Porto Bello with six ships only. But when I turned my eyes to his little landscapes and drawings I was charmed. These were the works of fancy, and gave him infinite delight. Madam Nature, not man, was then his only study, and he seemed intimately acquainted with that beautiful old lady."

Thicknesse, from this time onward, took Gainsborough under his wing, and rather complacently claimed credit for the discovery of his genius. In so doing he has outraged the feelings of some of Gainsborough's biographers, but with little reason. Such work as has been identified as Gainsborough's during his first years at Ipswich, though full of promise, was certainly not sufficiently striking to proclaim him the genius into which he later developed. That Thicknesse recognised the promise, and by his advice and support later induced Gainsborough to remove to a sphere in which his increasing powers might find room for full play, seems entirely to his credit. That in the course of his acquaintance with Gainsborough he should display some of those interesting eccentricities which all his friends encountered at one time or other, was inevitable. But

there is nothing dishonourable recorded in his dealings either with Gainsborough or any one else, and the painter on the whole reaped nothing but benefit from the acquaintance, though he certainly shared to the full that experience of Thicknesse's peculiarities which was the lot of all who came in contact with him.

Thicknesse describes himself as a very innocent and unoffending man except to rogues and rascals. He appears in the annals of his time as a harmless, if tiresome, original, who managed in one way or another to impress his individuality very strongly upon his contemporaries, and there is consequently little difficulty in getting at the worst that is known of him. This would appear to have been a rather quarrelsome temper, and a fondness for interference in other people's affairs by giving advice which was not wanted. He was the seventh son of John Thicknesse, of Farthinghoe, Northampton, who was descended from a reputable family in Staffordshire. Philip was born in 1719, and was consequently a relatively young man of thirty and upwards when he met Gainsborough, whose senior he was by some seven or eight years. He had, however, by that time crowded much experience into his years. He had begun as apothecary, but had flung up that profession, and in 1735 had gone to Georgia with Oglethorpe at the age of sixteen. Two years later he was back in England, in the employ of the trustees of that colony. This employment he soon lost by some plain speaking as to what he thought of Oglethorpe's administration, which no doubt appeared to his employers superfluous in a boy of eighteen or nineteen. Later he fought against the rebel negroes in Jamaica, but returned to England in 1740 after a disagreement with his brother officers. We read of him later in the Marines, and he was apparently in the Mediterranean in 1745 in that service. In Feb-

ruary of 1753 he bought the Governorship of Landguard Fort, which stood on the coast of Suffolk near Felixstowe, and, according to Thicknesse's latest biographer, Mr. C. W. Sutton, he did not meet Gainsborough until the following year, 1754.

In Suffolk, as elsewhere, Thicknesse seems to have come into collision with most of his acquaintance. He had some difference with the colonel of the local Militia, Francis Vernon, afterwards Lord Orwell and Earl of Shipbroke, to whom he derisively sent a piece of artillery carefully executed in wood. The action was very typical of his conduct throughout his life, but it cost him three months' imprisonment and a fine of three hundred pounds. Thicknesse had three wives altogether, the second of whom, Elizabeth Touchet, he married in 1749. This lady, as the eldest daughter of the Earl of Castlehaven, brought the barony of Audley to her eldest son. Another touch showing Thicknesse's eccentricity is an allusion to this son in the title of his own "Memoirs and Anecdotes of Philip Thicknesse, late Lieutenant-Governor of Landguard Fort, and unfortunately father to George Touchet, Baron Audley." His will contained a clause directing his right hand to be cut off and sent to Lord Audley, "to remind him of his duty to God after having so long abandoned the duty he owed to his father."

Philip was at issue with the Court of Chancery and the House of Lords over a sum of twelve thousand pounds he expected to receive from the relatives of his first wife. He wrote furious letters signed "Junius," in which he assailed the decision of those august tribunals in the Opposition newspapers; had a long controversy with Dr. Adair; earned the distinction of being gibbeted by Gillray as "Lieutenant-Governor Gallstone"; and was generally the stormy petrel of his times. But few took him quite seriously; some, indeed, found a good word to say for

this strenuous character. "Thicknesse was a man of probity and honour," says Mr. Nichols, of the *Literary Anecdotes*, "whose heart and purse were always open to the unfortunate." He was, indeed, as appears very plainly from his own account, more of an enemy to himself than to any one else.

Mr. Fulcher, however, would have none of the Governor. It is not quite easy to determine his precise offence. There was, it is true, a silly quarrel between Thicknesse and Gainsborough in later years, which we shall notice in its proper place, but the main grievance seems to have been that Thicknesse claimed to have recognised the painter's early abilities, and to have had the temerity to attempt his biography. In any case, in dealing with Thicknesse, Fulcher drops the placid, not to say stagnant, style of his narrative, and rises to an unwonted vigour of invective. We have stated what we believe to be the known facts of Thicknesse's career and the salient points of his character; it is but fair to present these as they appear to Mr. Fulcher. And we enter at length into such details, because, whatever the merits may be, one way or another, Thicknesse undoubtedly exercised an important influence upon the painter at more than one point in his career.

Here, accordingly, is Mr. Fulcher's character of the unfortunate Governor:—

"Handsome and insolent, a soldier and a bully, the father of a peer and the scandaliser of the nobility, he abused every privilege and neglected no opportunity of self-injury. He had, in a remarkable degree, the faculty of lessening the number of his friends and increasing the number of his enemies. He was perpetually imagining insult, and would sniff out injury from afar. Explanation, concession, apology, everything that would satisfy a gentleman, would not satisfy Philip Thicknesse. Con-



tention was essential to his existence. Presented with a commission in early life, almost the first use he made of it was to fight a duel. He obtained promotion and libelled his superior officer. Imprisonment could not teach him wisdom, for at the expiration of the term of his confinement his liberty again served as a cloak for maliciousness. After having lost friends, health, and fortune, he could think of no better method of revenging himself on mankind than by publishing his biography, wherein his spites, his bickerings, his disappointments, the ill-natured things he did, the mistakes he made, the worth he insulted, are recorded with a minuteness which his most malignant enemy might have envied. How he cured Lord Thurlow of bile and quarrelled with him about payment; how he was entrusted with the care of two young ladies in France, and how he confined them in a convent because their dog made a meal of Mrs. Thicknesse's parroquet; how he befriended an eminent actor in early life, and how ungrateful it was of him not to subscribe for a copy of the Memoirs; how he was entrusted with some private letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and how Lord Erskine wheedled out of him the secret of their address; how he got himself into the Queen's Bench Prison, and how his release was hailed by the Scotsmen who attempted to assassinate Wilkes, and by the veritable Cock Lane Ghost,—all these are told with a solemn gravity, expectant not merely of attention, but of sympathy, approval, and applause. With more than the weakness of Johnson's biographer, he had none of his reverence and devotion. Scarcely a Boswell in intellect, he was a Steevens in heart."

Well, well, the first thing this abandoned ruffian did at Ipswich was to give young Gainsborough a commission, and the pair remained close friends for years.

To turn again to the Governor's narrative:—"Soon after this" (his call upon Gainsborough), says he, "the late King passed by the garrison under my command, and, as I wanted a subject to employ Mr. Gainsborough's pencil, I desired him to come and eat a dinner with me, and to take down in his pocket-book the particulars of the fort, the adjacent hills, and the distant view of Harwich, in order to form a landscape of the yachts passing the garrison, of the size of a panel over my chimney-piece. He accordingly came, and in a short time brought the picture."

Unfortunately, the canvas can now only be judged from the engraving made from it by Thomas Major: the origin of this engraving and the cause of the disappearance of the picture itself are very plainly stated by Thicknesse, who thus continues his narrative:—

"I was much pleased with the performance, and, asking him the price, he modestly said that he hoped I would not think fifteen guineas too much. I assured him that in my opinion it would, if offered to be sold in London, produce double that sum, and accordingly paid him, thanked him, and lent him an excellent fiddle. . . . The following winter I went to London, and I suspected—for, like Mr. Gainsborough, I only suspected—that my landscape had uncommon merit. I therefore took it with me, and as Mr. Major, the engraver, was then just returned from Paris, and esteemed the first artist in London, I showed it to him. He admired it so much that I urged him, for both their sakes as well as mine, to engrave a plate from it, which he seemed very willing to undertake, but doubted whether it would by its sale, as it was only a perspective view of the fort, answer the expense; to obviate which, I offered to take ten guineas' worth of impressions myself. He then instantly agreed to do it. The impression will show the merits of both

artists; but, alas, the picture being left against a wall which had been made with salt water, is perished and gone. That engraving made Mr. Gainsborough's name known beyond the circle of his country residence."

This engraving is of some importance in tracing the development of Gainsborough's art, as it fixes, approximately at least, the date of one of the first of his known landscapes. Sir Walter Armstrong places this date, together with that of a picture of much the same style now in the National Gallery of Ireland, as between the years 1750-52. If, however, it be correct that Thicknesse only made the acquaintance of the painter in 1754, as stated by his biographer, this date must be shifted a few years later. The later hypothesis seems the more plausible, if only as placing a longer interval between a really respectable performance and the crudity of Mr. Cobbold's sham Dutch canvas. In any case, the engraving shows a very presentable landscape, and is obviously the production of a man who had at least seen for himself and honestly attempted to record his impressions. From Thicknesse's own account, it was painted to fill a particular space in the Governor's parlour, and by the nature of the commission the subject was provided by the patron, and little choice left to the artist. Yet, with all these limitations, the print suggests a painting of the true open-air quality, with freshness and light in its tones, and painted under a real sky. It shows the Landguard Fort which had inspired the Governor to give the commission, Harwich in the distance, and the estuary duly provided with a procession of passing ships, though we miss the salute from the fort. There are figures of a man and a country maid in the foreground, and a curve of unmistakable, if rather conventional, waves on the beach on the true right of the canvas.

The Irish picture, which must be of the same period, has very similar features. It has the same quality of open air and freshness, and is painted under the same spacious sky of that eastern county. It shows a road running past a low bank towards a distant church and past a real sandpit, and with an unmistakable oak on the right of the canvas. There is a somewhat pathetic figure of an old horse above the pit, which was later to appear in many of the painter's landscapes, and a boy and dog, and a man with a donkey in the near middle distance. The road leads into the picture; the different planes of the middle distance and distance retire in proper order towards the horizon; and the composition, with its chief lines radiating from a point near the left hand of the canvas, is pleasing and artistic. It is difficult to imagine this and Mr. Cobbald's picture as coming from the same hand. In some ways this canvas seems to suggest the influence of Ruysdael on the painter.

A third landscape of this period is in the possession of Mr. R. W. Hudson, and was exhibited in the Guildhall collection of loan pictures in 1902, though it is attributed in the catalogue to the years 1747-48. It shows a castle or cathedral something like that of Durham in the distance in an early morning light, a boy driving cows, and a man and woman in a cart with a white horse coming up a road in the left foreground, while a tramp sleeps in the shadow on the right. The tones are high, and the colour cool and silvery, and, whatever the exact year of its production, it may be ranked with confidence with the "Landguard Fort" and the Irish landscape as one of the few known early Gainsborough landscapes.

These three pictures have a further interest as marking the first known period in the artist's artistic life. If we except Mr. Cobbald's picture, everything he







CORNARD WOOD

painted in landscape, at least before they appeared, has yet to be discovered. If we take the later date 1755 as the approximate year of their appearance, Gainsborough would be twenty-seven at the time; if the earlier, 1747, he would be twenty. From what we know of his life and from the evidence of the pictures themselves, he must have completed many canvases before even the earlier of these dates. These unknown works present a promising field for the intelligent critic with leisure and enterprise for their discovery.

From the period of these pictures forward, Gainsborough's landscape art is best followed in the National Gallery in London. The landscapes Gainsborough painted during his early career in Suffolk, to be seen there, are the well-known "Cornard Wood," or "Gainsborough's Forest," the "View of Dedham," and the two small upright landscapes presented to the gallery in 1896 by the Misses Lane. The canvases were probably painted in the order stated. The National Gallery is also a convenient spot for considering the influence of certain painters of the Dutch school upon Gainsborough's landscape, which appears to be undoubted, though no one has ever explained where he found access to a collection before his migration to Bath. It may be recalled, however, that John Crome, a generation later, found means of studying the Dutchmen, long before he left that same eastern country. It is certainly impossible to doubt the influence of some of the less mighty of the Dutchmen, even after the most perfunctory comparison of such men as Wynants, Both, Cuyp, and Ruysdael, with the few known early landscapes of Gainsborough. Wynants supplies him with the subject even of such works as that in the Dublin Gallery, while Ruysdael suggests a treatment for the trees. The placing of his figures on the canvas in most of these early works

is reminiscent of Both and Cuyp. Both's habit of a glow of light behind trees, which one sees in most of the less rugged of his subjects, indeed influenced Gainsborough throughout his career as a painter of landscape. In the winter exhibition at the Royal Academy of 1902-3 there was an interesting group of figures crossing a bridge with a cart, which was a recognisable reflection of the works of that master in an adjoining room.

In the "Cornard Wood" there are the same fidelity to the details of foliage, the same tightness of handling, and the same restraint of colour which you find in the Dutchmen, and, allowing for the typically English character of the scene depicted, "Cornard Wood" might almost have been painted by Both or Berghem. The solemn tones, too, which we shall find as characteristic of the landscape of Gainsborough's middle years perhaps owe something to his impressions received as a young man from such painters as Jacob Ruysdael and Aart van der Neer.

The "View of Dedham" must be of much the same period as the "Cornard Wood," though perhaps a little later. There is the same careful characterisation in the trees, but combined with a more felicitous composition and placing of the figures, the same feeling for a bit of distance showing through trees, and the same delight in spacious effects of cloud. In this picture, however, there is already a slight loosening in the handling and a slight warming of the colour, which are prophetic of some of the later developments of his landscape. The same qualities reappear in the two small upright landscapes, combined with a lowering of tone, and a more noticeable abandonment of the literal rendering of foliage of the earlier works.

Succeeding exhibitions occasionally disclose other



landscapes of the Ipswich period. There was a "View of Henny Church" at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1885, which is ascribed to the early period of the "Landguard Fort." Another, catalogued as a "Landscape, Suffolk," appeared at the same exhibition as the property of Mr. E. Milles Nelson, and is of the later time, perhaps. It showed a wayside cottage, a woman nursing a baby, with two boys, at a door. A girl with a jug on her head and followed by a dog goes towards the house, while a man drives cows in the middle distance.

Fulcher speaks of "two of his most elaborate performances painted for his former master, Hayman," which in 1856 were in the possession of Mr. J. H. Hawkins of Bognor Park. These, from a tradition which Fulcher relates, seem to belong to the period of the "Cornard Wood." "Gainsborough declared he would never bestow so much time on a picture again. They were both drawn and coloured in the open air: in one of them a young oak is painted leaf for leaf, while ferns and grasses are portrayed with microscopic fidelity." Another undoubted landscape of the Suffolk period is in the possession of Mr. Humphrey Roberts. It shows a group of alders at the outside of a wood near a stream, a typical Gainsborough horse, cart, and woman, and a fisherman standing on a bridge.

The little medallion, too, of the Charterhouse, now in the Foundling Hospital, dates from the Suffolk period. An inscription on the frame assigns it to the year 1746; but its treatment suggests a later date. There are a breadth in the handling and a similarity in the treatment of the trees on the right of the picture which range it with tolerable certainty among the works painted towards the end of Gainsborough's stay in Suffolk, of which the two small landscapes at the National Gallery are typical examples. The colour

is sombre and rather hot, but there is a broad Suffolk sky, and the work contrasts favourably with the other medallions of the London charitable institutions painted by Wilson, Hale, and Haytley, which hang near it. The mention of two landscapes in the Fuller collection in New York seems to conclude the list—landscapes which can be at present ascribed to Gainsborough during the period of his residence in his native county.

It must have been while Gainsborough was engaged upon the pleasant labour of those early landscapes that he encountered a kindred spirit in Joshua Kirby. "One day," says Fulcher, "as he was sketching near Freston Tower, on the banks of the Orwell, a stranger who was passing paused to watch the progress of his pencil, and, after looking on in silence for a few minutes, introduced himself to Gainsborough as Joshua Kirby." Kirby at this time was a coachpainter at Ipswich, though later he became somewhat notable as President of the Incorporated Society of Artists, which office he filled at the time of the great division which preceded the birth of the Royal Academy. He was also teacher of perspective to George the Third. The acquaintance thus begun ripened into a friendship which lasted their joint lives, as is touchingly plain from the fact that Gainsborough at his own request was laid by the side of Kirby in Kew churchyard.

Henry Angelo, in those pleasant volumes which preserve so vividly much of the life of his day which a later generation christened *Bohemian*, tells us something of the early intimacy of Joshua Kirby with Gainsborough. He had heard, he says, his father speak of Kirby as a person universally esteemed by the artists of his time. "Gainsborough and he were intimate friends from their boyhood, and had often studied together, amidst the sylvan scenery adjacent to Sudbury. Every one ac-

quainted with Gainsborough knew that he was a rattle. It was therefore highly amusing to witness the contrast of character in him and his friend, the mild and modest Kirby.

"Kirby worshipped the talent of Gainsborough; he considered him the greatest genius of his age, and, looking on as he performed his moppings, in an ecstasy would exclaim, "Marvellous, inscrutable, miraculous!"—in return for which honest expressions the other used to dub him "old pudging Josh."

"I remember Gainsborough once saying, in speaking of the landscape efforts of his old crony Kirby, whom he really loved, and, capricious as he was, whom he never slighted, that if on their sketching excursions an unusually unpicturesque building or a fantastically formed tree occurred, Kirby immediately sat down to delineate it as an addenda to his portfolio. "His lines are all straight," said Gainsborough, "and his ideas all crooked, by Jove. How the devil the old frump ever consented to Hogarth's travestie frontispiece to his 'Treatise on Perspective,' I never could devise: had I proposed such a thing, he would have pronounced me mad."

This plate is the well-known absurdity, afterwards published among Hogarth's collected works, which shows with great humour the pitfalls for the artist without a knowledge of perspective. It bears the inscription: "Whoever makes a design without a knowledge of perspective will be liable to such absurdities as are shown in this frontispiece."

We shall have occasion to notice Kirby's acquaintance with the painter in later years, in its proper place. Here that acquaintance has an interest for us as throwing some little light on Gainsborough's life and personality during his last years in his native county. Kirby went

to London in 1753, where he settled, but left his son behind him as a pupil of Gainsborough's. The good man wrote a letter to the boy urging upon him the practice of religion. "My letter," he said, "may serve as Sunday meditation, and let no one see it except Master W., the companion of your studies." Who Master W. was has not been ascertained, but the fact that Gainsborough at this time had two pupils at least, which Edwards in his *Anecdotes* says was not known, is thus established. A prim sister, afterwards Mrs. Trimmer, an exhibitor at the Society of Arts, and authoress of many improving books for children, also wrote to young Kirby, impressing upon him the necessity of politeness, and in so doing she holds up Gainsborough as a model in that particular. "Having," she says, "so good an example to copy after, I imagine you improve very much in politeness."

We really know little of Gainsborough's life at Ipswich. Fulcher tells us that he was often employed in painting the mansions and parks of the county gentry, and more frequently in portraying the persons of their wives and daughters, and that "he was hospitably entertained in their houses, and money began to flow in." The list of Gainsborough's patrons is not a long one, but among them was a Mr. Hingeston, a clergyman of Southwold; and that gentleman's son, in a letter to a friend written many years after this period, supplies the few details of his personality which have survived.

"I remember Gainsborough well," wrote Mr. Hingeston; "he was a great favourite with my father; indeed, his affable and agreeable manners endeared him to all with whom his profession brought him in contact, either at the cottage or the castle. There was that peculiar bearing which could not fail to leave a pleasing impression. Many houses in Suffolk, as well as in the



neighbouring county, were always open to him. I have seen the aged features of the peasantry lit up with a grateful recollection of his many acts of kindness and benevolence. My father's residence bears testimony alike to his skill as a painter and his kindness as a man, for the panels of several of the rooms are adorned with the productions of his genius. In one is a picture of Gainsborough's daughters when young; they are engaged in chasing a butterfly; the arrangement of the figures and the landscape introduced are of the most charming description. There are several other drawings, all in good preservation, and delineated in his happiest manner."

There is no record of the birth of these two girls, but, from a consideration of dates and of the portraits Gainsborough painted of them in their childhood, we may assume they were born in the second and third years after his marriage with Margaret Burr. The elder took her mother's name of Margaret, the younger was christened Mary. Little is known of their childhood, but we shall catch glimpses of them as young women in later years. Mary alone married, but the union was an unhappy one and of short duration, and, as she died childless, Thomas Gainsborough's line became extinct upon the death of his two daughters, in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. So far as we know, none of his brothers left sons, and the present representatives of the family are the descendants of his sister Susan Gardiner, who settled at Bath, unless indeed there are still living descendants of the other sisters, Mrs. Gibbon, Mrs. Dupont, and Mrs. Bird.

Fulcher published two letters of the painter himself, addressed from Ipswich to some legal gentleman in Colchester, which are of great interest as giving his views in 1757 upon some points of his art. The addresses of

these letters are missing, with the exception of the words "ey-at-law"; but it has been plausibly suggested that they were written to a Mr. Edgar, of a family known to have employed the painter in those early days, who was at that time practising in Ipswich as an attorney.

"SIR,—I am favoured with your obliging letter, and shall finish your picture in two or three days at farthest, and send to Colchester, according to your order, with a frame. I thank you, sir, for your kind intention of procuring me a few heads to paint when I come over, which I purpose doing as soon as some of those are finished which I have in hand. I should be glad if you'd place your picture as far from the light as possible, observing to let the light fall from the left. Favour me with a faithful account of what is generally thought of it, and as to my bill, it will be time enough when I see you, who am, sir, your most obedient, humble servant,

"THO. GAINSBOROUGH.

"IPSWICH, *Feby. 24th, 1757.*"

"SIR,—I am favoured with your obliging letter, and return you many thanks for your kind intention. I thought I should have been at Colchester by this time, as I promis'd my sister I would take the first opportunity; but business comes in, and, being chiefly in the face way, I am afraid to put people off when they are in the mind to sit.

"You please me much by saying that no other fault is found in your picture than the roughness of the surface; for that part being of use in giving force to the effect at a proper distance, and what a judge of painting knows an original from a copy by, in short being the touch of the pencil, which is harder to preserve than smoothness, I am much better pleas'd that they should

spy out things of that kind, than to see an eye half an inch out of its place, or a nose out of drawing when viewed at a proper distance.

“I don’t think it would be more ridiculous for a person to put his nose close to the canvas and say the colours smell offensive, than to say how rough the paint lies; for one is just as material as the other with regard to hurting the effect and drawing of a picture. Sir Godfrey Kneller used to tell them that pictures were not made to smell of: what made his pictures more valuable than others with the connoisseurs was his pencil and touch.

“I hope, sir, you will pardon this dissertation upon pencil and touch, for if I gain no better point than to make you and Mr. Clubb laugh when you next meet again at the sign of the Tankard, I shall be very well contented. I am sure I could not paint his picture for laughing, he gave such a description of eating and drinking at that place. I little thought you were a lawyer when I said not one in ten was worth the hanging. I told Clubb of that, and he seemed to think I was lucky that I did not say one in a hundred. It’s too late to ask your pardon now, but really, sir, I never saw one of your profession look so honest in my life, and that’s the reason I concluded you were in the wool trade. Sir Jaspar Wood was so kind as to set me right, otherwise perhaps I should have made more blunders.—I am sir, your most obliged, obedient, and humble servant,

“THO. GAINSBOROUGH.

“IPSWICH, *March 13th, 1758.*”

We seem to see in this letter some indications of points in the painter’s personality which became more emphasised in later years—his joviality and good fellowship, for example, and his habit of plain speech. There

is a passage in the letter of John Constable to John T. Smith which we have already quoted, which has a bearing upon the same qualities of Gainsborough's character. "He belonged," says Constable, "to a musical club in that town (Ipswich), and painted some of their portraits in a picture of a choir; it is said to be very curious. I heard it was in Colchester. I shall endeavour to see it before I come to town, which will be soon. He was generally the butt of the company, and his wig was to them a fund of amusement, as it was often snatched from his head and thrown about the room."

The picture, according to Fulcher, who saw it in the possession of Mr. Strutt, junr., was painted from memory, and represents a convivial meeting by candle-light. The figures include Captain Clarke, a friend of the painter; Wood, a dancing master; one Mills; Gibbs, a musician; and Gainsborough himself. Wood is playing the violin, and is accompanied by Mills on the violoncello, while Gibbs, who was the only real musician of the party, is represented fast asleep—an ironical touch quite in keeping with what we know of Gainsborough's character. Mr. Strutt told Fulcher that "when Gainsborough was leaving Ipswich his friends paid a last visit to his studio, and expressed a wish to have some memorial of his pencil. The good-natured artist complied: one took one sketch, another another, and, finally, that I have been describing came into my father's hands."

The list of portraits known to have been painted by Gainsborough in Suffolk is not a long one. The earliest of all perhaps is the portrait of Margaret Burr, which Fulcher and Cunningham thought played so large a part in his betrothal to that young woman. Fulcher mentions this portrait as in the possession of Mr. Sharp, and Mrs. Sharp exhibited a portrait at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1885 which was catalogued as "Margaret Burr." Sir







THE PAINTER'S DAUGHTERS

Walter Armstrong, however, describes the canvas as representing a young woman of thirty to thirty-five, which seems to throw some doubt on its identity. Of the same date must be the portrait of young Gainsborough by himself, said to have been painted in a couple of sittings just before his marriage, in 1745, belonging to Sir George Richmond. Mr. Cobbold has a group in small of two very plain young women with a sheep and lamb, in a landscape of a naïve and stiff treatment, which must be a very early work.

There are four paintings of Gainsborough's daughters, all taken at much the same age, which preserve his style in portraiture at this period with great accuracy. These are the group in little to be seen at South Kensington, the unfinished group, and the single portrait of one of the children in the possession of Mr. Gardiner, which Mrs. Bell reproduces in her volume, and the larger group of the two girls which was acquired by the National Gallery by the Vaughan Bequest in 1900. This, apparently, is the canvas mentioned by Mr. Hingeston, as the children are shown chasing a butterfly. It presents two rather unattractive children of the apparent ages of six and eight years, hand in hand, the elder in a frock of dull lemon colour, the younger in a grey dress and pinafore. The ages of the girls would date this canvas at about 1754 or 1755. The treatment, however, especially of the background, almost suggests that it was painted very much later from a sketch of this time. There is a thistle in the foreground, painted with all the certainty and breadth of Gainsborough's later backgrounds, together with a restraint in colour and a lowness of tone, which seem to separate it from other known work of the Ipswich period. It is in an astonishing state of preservation, and might have been painted within the last ten years.

One of the best known portraits of this period is that

of Admiral Vernon, mentioned by Thicknesse as in the painter's studio when he made his acquaintance, and now in the National Portrait Gallery. It represents the admiral in a very painstaking manner, and standing in the true Hudsonian attitude with his hand in his coat and hat under his arm. The crimson coat is rendered in very minute and careful fashion, and the shadow of the wig upon the forehead is not less conscientiously painted. The known dates of Vernon's career, together with Thicknesse's mention of the picture, place this canvas in date by the side of the group of his daughters, from which, however, it differs greatly in treatment.

Later canvases of this period are a portrait of Miss Hippesley, now in the possession of Sir Charles Tennant; two portrait ovals of the Edgar family, that of the man being probably the work mentioned by Gainsborough in his letter of 1757, which we have set out; there are also portraits of the Rev. James Hingeston and his son, exhibited in 1885 by Mr. Milles Nelson, which are of unblemished pedigree. A portrait of a youngish man in a cocked hat belonging to Mrs. Pym of Braxtead, Kent, and described as a presentment of Wolfe, ought to be of this period, only that its treatment suggests a much later date of origin. An authentic canvas of this time, however, is the attractive group of Thomas Sandby and his wife, which is engraved in the small series published by Messrs. Graves. It was exhibited in 1859 as portraits of Gainsborough and his wife. Sandby is shown in a red coat and breeches and a cocked hat, his lady in a pink and white dress and a blue fringed petticoat and straw hat, and the pair are seated in a landscape with a summer house in the classic style in the background.

Thomas Sandby was the elder brother of Paul Sandby, the better known of the two, perhaps, but was a competent draughtsman and an ingenious capable fellow.



Luck came to him at Fort William in the '45, when at the age of twenty-four he was the first to carry the news of the landing of the Young Pretender to the Government, was appointed draughtsman to the Duke of Cumberland as a reward, and accompanied that hero to Flanders in that capacity.

Later came the appointment of Deputy Ranger in Windsor Great Park, where Sandby's talent for landscape gardening resulted in the formation of the ornamental water which we now know as Virginia Water. He was a capable architect also, built Freemasons' Hall, and was at one time professor of that art to the Royal Academy.

Mr. Strutt's picture of the "Musical Club" is one of the first of many evidences of Gainsborough's love of music, of which we shall encounter many during the story of his life. He chose his chief friends from among musicians, and, without time or opportunity of attaining any great proficiency upon any particular instrument, he was acquainted with a great many, and intermittent practice upon one or the other continued his chief pleasure to the end of his life. Some doubt has been thrown upon his taste for music and upon his skill, but with little justification. The doubts are mainly founded upon a dissertation upon Gainsborough as a musician which was delivered by his friend Mr. Jackson of Exeter, many years after the painter's death. This we shall examine in its proper place; upon the other side we may quote Thicknesse, who has a remark bearing upon the point during the period of the painter's life which was passed at Ipswich. In recording his first dealings with Gainsborough in the matter of the picture of "Landguard Fort," Thicknesse mentions that, in paying Gainsborough, "I thanked him, and lent him an excellent fiddle, for I found that he had as much taste for music as he had for painting, though he had

then never touched a musical instrument, for at that time he seemed to envy even my poor talents as a fiddler; but before I got my fiddle home he had made such proficiency in music that I would as soon have painted against him as to have attempted to fiddle against him."

Gainsborough in 1759 had entered his thirty-third year, and had been painting professionally for fifteen years at least. The most cursory examination of the list of works which have been authoritatively ascribed to this first period of his life convinces one that the greater portion of his early work has yet to be discovered. We have already examined the various canvases which have been attributed to him from the time of his apprenticeship in London onward, and, at its fullest, the list is a meagre one as the work of a strenuous personality during a period of fifteen years. Beginning with the drawings in the National Gallery of Ireland, we have those drawings—the Miss Hipplesey, Mr. Cobbold's early group, the four renderings of his daughters; the portrait of Margaret Burr, his own portrait, the two Hingeston portraits, the Sandby group, the two Edgar portraits, that of Admiral Vernon, and perhaps the Wolfe mentioned by Mrs. Bell. To stretch the list as far as possible, we include Mr. Strutt's "Musical Club," and a bust of Heneage Lloyd mentioned by some writers as of this period.

In landscape there are the Cobbold picture, the "Landguard Fort," and the landscape in the National Gallery of Ireland, the Suffolk landscape of Mr. Humphrey Roberts, and the landscape of Mr. Hudson; the Henny Church; Mr. Milles Nelson's Suffolk landscape; the two canvases mentioned by Fulcher; the medallion of the Foundling Hospital, and the "Cornard Wood,"

"Dedham Vale," and two upright canvases of the National Gallery.

These works, portrait and landscape together, amount to just thirty-three, which represent a couple of completed works for each year of Gainsborough's working life up to the age of thirty-three. It is quite obvious that this list of his known pictures cannot represent a tithe of his work during the period we have been considering. From all we know of his character, nothing is more certain than that his was an eminently energetic temperament, and that, apart from all considerations of means of living, his pencil must have been regularly employed during those fifteen years. Considered as a help to his wife's income, his known work need hardly be reckoned at all. A third of it at least was work which was not painted for profit, and, at the rate of pay he is likely to have received, the rest may have produced something between ten and twenty pounds a year. Unless we are willing to believe that Gainsborough was content with his wife's annuity, and to spend the greater portion of his early manhood in ignoble loafing, there must be a great number of his earlier works, in portraiture especially, awaiting identification.

The thought should be very stimulating to persons of leisure with a taste for haunting salerooms. His style during this period both in landscape and portraiture is perfectly distinguishable from everything he painted later. In landscape it may be traced perfectly in the works we have already considered at the National Collection.

We may look for the Gainsborough who still painted from nature, but in whose work the Dutch faithfulness of foliage and detail which we see in the "Cornard Wood" is giving way to the generalisations of the upright

pictures at the National Gallery. A broad line, too, divides this early landscape work from the development which was to come suddenly later. In his later work in landscape appears that subjective quality which was the product of an intellectual process working upon the materials gathered during the impressionable years of his youth and early manhood.

Gainsborough's progress in portraiture is less easy to follow, by reason of the difficulty of comparing a sufficient number of his early works with each other. The small group of his daughters at South Kensington and the Admiral Vernon at the National Portrait Gallery are typical specimens of his earlier portraits. We may look for the prim and formal attitudes of those portraits or of Mr. Gardiner's studies of his daughters, together with a careful elaboration of dress and accessories.

Here, again, the line between his later and earlier work is broad and unmistakable. The qualities we have named were destined to disappear with a suddenness without any precedent in the work of a modern artist. This sudden development of his art was the direct and most important result of his leaving Ipswich for Bath, in the year 1760.

Thicknesse claimed credit for persuading the painter to this great change in his professional and personal prospects, but there were really a score of reasons which might have led Gainsborough to make the change without much persuasion. His daughters were growing up, and were already showing signs of great personal attractions, which would have less scope for their proper influence in Suffolk than in a resort of fashion like Bath. Mrs. Gainsborough's influence would also be cast in the same scale, for that lady was as yet a young woman with great personal attractions of her own. The advantages of Bath, both professional and private,





MR. AND MRS. SANDBY



must have been well known to Gainsborough, who had two sisters settled there, and was well able to compare those advantages with his present prospects at Ipswich. Gainsborough, during fifteen years in the Suffolk town, must have arrived at a very close estimate of its capabilities for a professional man, and have realised that he had exhausted them, or at any rate that they presented little opportunity for an advance from his present position as an artist. Moreover, the possibilities of the successful portrait painter as exemplified in the phenomenal success of Reynolds, who had set up in St. Martin's Lane seven years earlier, had not been lost upon Gainsborough. Reynolds's fame must have reached even Ipswich, and his success was a sufficient reason for unsettling Gainsborough, and also for making him avoid London as a new starting-point, where such competition must be encountered. Bath, on the other hand, presented obvious advantages. Its population was largely composed of people of means and fashion, and the city was without any portrait painter of respectable ability. All these were reasons why Gainsborough was ready to lend a willing ear to Thicknesse when that gentleman either proposed the great experiment, or added his persuasion to the other considerations which we have mentioned as likely to have influenced the painter.

### CHAPTER III

BATH—1760-1765

WE have no desire to rob Governor Thicknesse of any credit which may be due to him for his generous overlooking of Gainsborough's affairs, and his attitude of good genius to the painter is so engaging that we are induced to state his claims as author of the good results which followed the move to Bath, in his own words. In recording Gainsborough's early musical tastes and accomplishments in the passage we have already quoted, he mentions his loan of the fiddle as among the happy auguries which attended their acquaintance, and continues:—

“I believe it was what I had said about the landscape and Thomas Peartree's Head which first induced Mr. Gainsborough to suspect—for he only suspected it—that he had something more in him which might be fetched out; he found he could fetch a good tune out of my fiddle, and why not out of his palate.”

The engraving from the picture of “Landguard Fort,” the Governor contended, “made Mr. Gainsborough's name known beyond the circle of his country residence,” and it was his boast that he added yet to all the benefits his countenance had conferred upon the artist, by persuading him to forsake his native Suffolk for Bath. “He was soon after, by me and several of his friends, urged to remove to Bath and try his talents at protrait painting



in that fluctuating city, at which time I had a house there, and resided during winters."

Old Thicknesse's complacent tone in recounting his early services to the painter who was destined to become so famous, has annoyed some of Gainsborough's biographers. But we have already reviewed the considerations which may have influenced Gainsborough in making the move to Bath; and whatever Thicknesse's share in them may have been, there is no doubt whatever that he presided over many of the tiresome details of the change of habitation, and that he was constantly at the painter's elbow during the troublesome business of finding a house in the western city. It would appear, indeed, that he received the family under his own roof until that house should be discovered.

"After his arrival in Bath," says he, "I accompanied him in search of lodgings where a good painting-room as to light, proper access, etc., could be had; and upon our return to our house, where his wife was impatiently awaiting the event, he told her he had seen lodgings of fifty pounds a year in the churchyard, which he thought might answer his purpose. The poor woman, highly alarmed, thinking it must all come out of her annuity, exclaimed, 'Fifty pounds a year! Mr. Gainsborough, why are you going to throw yourself into gaol?' But upon my telling her if she did not approve of the lodgings at fifty pounds a year he should take a house of a hundred and fifty, and that I would pay the rent if he could not, Margaret's alarms were moderated."

The Governor's dislike of poor Margaret appears very plainly in this characteristic passage, but there is no reason to doubt his officious solicitude in Gainsborough's behalf, and it would appear that by their united efforts a suitable lodging was at last found for the painter and his family.

One of the most painstaking of the modern Bath antiquaries, who are many and able, places this lodging in the Abbey churchyard. Later, Gainsborough removed to Ainstie's Belvidere, "where he could enjoy a beautiful view of Hampton Rocks, his favourite sketching grounds. Charging at first only five guineas for a portrait, he spent the intervals of the sittings in studying the fine trees of the neighbourhood, notably the elm near the London Road, still standing and called Gainsborough's Elm. His studio being soon sought by discerning visitors, he ventured to hire a house in the Circus."

Bath in 1760 was perhaps the most notable of the English provincial cities. It enjoyed a unique distinction as the result of a variety of causes, of which the chief were its situation among the hills of the gentle west country; the fame of its mineral waters; its adoption as a lounging place by people of wealth and leisure; and the remarkable abilities of three or four of its citizens—Ralph Allen, the architects Wood (father and son), John Palmer (the proprietor of its theatre), the Wiltshires, and perhaps the eminent Beau Nash. Nash, we believe, has had more than his share of credit in the making of Bath, the chief part in which belongs of right to some of the others we have named, whose efforts alone made the career of the famous Master of the Ceremonies possible. Chief among these was Ralph Allen, the enlightened man of affairs and philanthropist, the patron of art and letters, first organiser of the postal system of England, and the real creator of the Bath that we know.

Gainsborough indeed found Bath fresh from the hands of Allen and his coadjutor, John Wood. Allen had made a huge fortune, which may be measured by the income he drew from Government for his organisation of the cross country posts, which may be reckoned at anything between £20,000 and £40,000 a year. He had sub-

stituted post-boys on horses for foot runners, organised a series of intersecting routes by which these post-boys exchanged their bags at proper stations, which enabled the mails to be distributed along the great main routes without the necessity of sending them to London; and, by the discovery and charting of these cross country tracks, initiated the system upon which many of the highways of the country were afterwards constructed. Soon after 1727 he discovered the capabilities of the Bath freestone, and from his quarries on Coombe Down hewed out the material of which Bath is built. The Bath stone before his day had been used only for small decorative objects, like finials and coats of arms for gentlemen's country gates; and it was Allen, with John Wood (who was cunning beyond the ordinary in the knowledge of technicalities of quarrying and the proper placing of the grain of the stone), who first vindicated the quality of the Bath freestone as a building material against its more famous rival from the quarries of Portland.

Among the first architectural efforts of Wood the elder were the North and South Parades; then came Queen Square, and to the north of that he planned the Circus on the crown of the hill at the top of Gay Street. The Circus interests us as the quarter of the city in which Gainsborough finally settled. It is an ellipse of thirty houses of three storeys each—the ground floor in the Doric style, the first floor in the Ionic, and the upper in the Corinthian order, surmounted by a balustrade. The Circus is an imposing piece of architecture; it was, however, only carried to completion by the younger Wood after the death of his father, and he has a claim to fame of his own in the planning of the two crescents which crown the heights and command a prospect of the whole city.

It was the elder Wood who built that stately failure,

Prior Park, for Allen—Prior Park with its imposing front and its columns of three feet in diameter, but without a comfortable room among its hundreds, which nevertheless fulfilled its avowed object as a final vindication of the Bath stone as a building material.

At Prior Park Allen lived like a prince, and entertained princes; filled his house with the most eminent men among his contemporaries, and dispensed a hospitality and a charity which were the admiration of his times. Gainsborough, as we learn from the researches of the local historians of the city, was often of the parties at Prior Park; here, earlier, too came Henry Fielding, who had a room of his own ready for him at all times, and repaid the hospitality by preserving the character of the blameless Allen in that of Squire Allworthy in *Tom Jones*; earlier still came Mr. Pope, who was one of the most faithful of Mr. Allen's guests, and embalmed his memory in those lines:

“Let humble Allen with an awkward shame  
Do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame.”

Mr. Pope, however, altered his note later when he proposed to bring Martha Blount to Prior Park, and found Allen averse from receiving that lady. The poet prepared a will in which he left Allen £150, the sum at which he estimated the hospitality he had received at his hands. Mr. Allen drily observed that Mr. Pope appeared to have forgotten the final cipher.

Gainsborough must have watched the raising of Pulteney Bridge—that effort of the brothers Adam which has been described as “worthy indeed of Paradise,” when, at the bidding of the heiress, Frances Pulteney, they threw that graceful street on three piers across the Avon, and continued it in a succession of palaces to Spring Gardens, the Vauxhall of Bath.



Another of the Bath worthies, whom we shall see later as an intimate of the painter, was John Palmer, the son of a brewer, but a devotee from his youth up of the drama. His father, after a struggle with the boy as to the choice of professions, in which the merits of the church, the army, and the parental brewery were all canvassed, allowed him to follow his bent. Palmer, with the help of eight other citizens, replaced the original barn (which was the only theatrical building in the place, and had excited the derision of the fashionables for a generation) by the theatre in Orchard Street. Father and son bought out the old interests, young Palmer went to London, and, after much contention with vested interests, brought back an Act protecting his property against the patentees of the London theatres, and a patent of his own under the King's own royal hand.

Young Palmer, on his return, found a strike in progress among his company, and, with an energy which was altogether characteristic of a Bath citizen of those days, rode his horse about the provinces for a fortnight, and returned with a new set of actors, with whom he managed to conduct his own theatre at Bath and a branch establishment at Bristol, till greater matters called him to London in 1785. During his frequent journeys to Bristol in a vehicle which he called a "sociable," and which carried his whole company, he was struck by the fact that he invariably beat the stage vehicles by many hours. This led him to the invention of the stage-coach, by which he put the crown upon Allen's work at the post office. He approached the younger Pitt in 1784, and induced him to give his system a trial. The trial, which reduced the journey between Bath and London from thirty to sixteen hours, led to his installation as Surveyor-General and Comp-

troller at the Central Post Office in London, at a salary of £1500 a year and a commission of two and a half per cent. upon any increased revenue which the system might bring to the Government. Palmer's was a masterful personality, which came in collision with the Commissioners, who discharged him with a commuted pension of £3000 a year after eight years' service. There followed a sixteen years' agitation on the part of the aggrieved Palmer, which resulted at last in the payment to him of £55,000 of arrears on account of his percentage, and the restoration of that commission on an enormously increased revenue during the remainder of his life.

Beau Nash had passed his prime when Gainsborough came to Bath, and was indeed ending miserably upon a weekly pension from the Corporation. By the time that George the Third came to the throne, Bath had been purged of most of the raffish excesses which had flourished under the fantastic rule of that famous Master of the Ceremonies, and the city was attaining its zenith as the resort of a decorous fashion. Beau Nash no doubt fulfilled a useful office in superintending the transformation of Bath from the place of the crude entertainments of the drunken Webster into the stately city of pleasure it became in the middle of the eighteenth century. But we gather from the careful antiquaries we have mentioned that his services have been vastly overrated. The fantastic *arbiter elegantiarum* with his team of cream-coloured ponies and his French horns, his pompous marshalling of duchesses, and his imposing manners in the Bath assemblies, was the Nash most obvious to the uninitiated. But if we are to believe his biographers, there was another and a shadier character about the city when the lights were put out so punctually at eleven o'clock at the Great Rooms—the patron of the



GEORGE COLMAN





gaming tables, from which he drew a large and secret income, those sinister institutions which were a scandal to the city, and the fertile source of that stream of tragedy which stains the annals of the place with its ghastly record of ruin and duels and suicides. In any case, the false glitter of the Nash régime had decayed with the discouragement of the dice-box which followed the example set at the Court of the young King George, and Mr. Nash's mantle had descended upon Captain Wade, who presided over a more decorous scheme of entertainment, and whom Gainsborough was presently to paint.

The social England of the times seems centred in the western city of the middle years of the century, if one may judge by the place it fills not only in the memoirs and letters of the period, but also in the fiction and drama of the times. Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, and later Sheridan, not to mention lesser lights, all chose the city as the setting for the creatures of their imagination. Many of them found their characters ready to hand in its more notable residents and visitors. The public rooms of Bath we take to have been the one spot in England where the light and leading of English society was drawn to a focus at any time between the reigns of Queen Anne and George the Fourth. It was perhaps at its brightest at the time we are considering. There was a continuous procession of the leaders of every section of gentility through those famous rooms for a hundred years at least. The hot baths were not for more than a small proportion of the visitors to the watering place; the gouty and aged were inclined to leave the delights of the assemblies and concerts to the young and active. But any visitor who was able to appear in public at all was of the company which assembled to sip the water or hear the gossip of the

pump-room at Bath. It was a place where the statesman laid aside politics and met his opponents on neutral ground; where the generals and admirals solaced themselves in the intervals of fighting with the French, and rested to recover from the hard knocks they had received. The young poet or man of letters whom a new work brought into notice went to Bath as a matter of course, to increase his patronage and to obtain subscribers for his new volume. Bishops and the clergy were constantly in evidence at a place where preferment was at the disposal of so many patrons,

“And all, to be better prepared for herea’ter,  
Took a smack of the brimstone contained in the water,”

as Mr. Anstey, the laureate of fashionable Bath, sings. Wits and beaux reserved their epigrams for the morning meeting, and professional beauties simpered and sipped the waters as a means of restoring their complexions after the late hours and dissipations of a London season.

Great actors and actresses found brilliant audiences ready to listen to them at Palmer’s theatre, and an actor meeting with success in Bath was sure of an engagement in London. The music of Bath, too, with the adorable Linleys as its centre, is almost a national tradition.

Such was the Bath to which Gainsborough came in 1760, and on the whole it would seem that a portrait painter could have made no better choice as a field for his art.

In these times and surroundings, accordingly, Gainsborough set up his easel and took the most important step in his artistic career. The move was undoubtedly a bold one, and evidently the result of a sudden impulse on the part of the painter, urged from his lotus-eating

in Suffolk probably by some feeling of unrest, possibly by the rumours of Reynolds's success in London, and certainly by the solicitations of his friends, including the Governor. The step was abundantly justified, but it was a brave one nevertheless. There is no reason to think that Gainsborough in 1760 had any exalted opinion of his own powers, or that he was moved by any great ambitions. His chief love in his profession was the study of nature and the practice of the unremunerative branch of landscape painting, for which at the time there was no encouragement in England. Neither in portraiture nor in landscape, so far as we can judge, had he at this time produced anything to justify any great aspirations. His work was respectable, certainly, but if he had died at Ipswich at the age of thirty-three the world would have heard little and cared less about the work of Thomas Gainsborough.

It is true, nevertheless, that those seemingly barren years in Suffolk were really years of rich harvest for the painter, or rather a season of seedtime, which was in due season to result in a plenteous fruition. We are apt to forget, in the absence of any great volume of work, whether in portrait or in landscape, attributable to the Suffolk period of his life, how long that period continued. Reynolds during the parallel years of his professional life left some five hundred canvases. Gainsborough's known works, as we have seen, amount to a poor thirty. Others must exist, but, whatever their number, they are certainly of the same rank in art as those of which we know. But the real gains of those fifteen years in the eastern county came from his constant contact with nature at an impressionable age, and the absence from his training of all the fetters and formulas of the schools. His artistic understanding was formed during those years, and his retentive mind was stored with the facts which

alone made possible the development of his art, which came so suddenly later.

Those faculties, however, waited for their quickening upon the influences which were brought to bear upon his temperament by his removal from the quiet of Suffolk to the full life of Bath, and might have lain dormant for ever at Ipswich in the humdrum existence which the painter at first seems to have proposed for himself. Old Thicket, indeed, was not far wrong in his quaint turn of speech: "He had found he could fetch a good tone out of my fiddle, and why not out of his own palate?" There was no better place in England than the Bath we have described as a field for the development of such an artistic personality as Gainsborough's. Its houses and lodgings during four months of the year were filled with the most beautiful women in Europe, whose presence was full of possibilities for an intelligence so alert and so sensitive to beauty as Gainsborough's. The fashion and glitter of the life at Bath, too, must have been a revelation to the painter after the tea parties and mild dissipation of a provincial town. Gainsborough's love of music, too, perhaps first found satisfaction in the admirable entertainments which were so great a feature of the amusements of Bath. His chosen friends throughout life were the professors of that sister art to which he was so devoted, and at Bath his intimates included few others than musicians and actors. It requires little imagination to realise Gainsborough's delight at hearing that marvellous voice of Elizabeth Linley, a delight which found such adequate expression in those three presentations of that beauteous personality in which so much of its charm is preserved. Bath, too, in all probability supplied Gainsborough with his first real experience of the stage; in any case, he would there find opportunities of theatre-going which were unsurpassed even in London,



and were most certainly denied to him at Ipswich. We know that he made the fullest use of these, and that he was on more or less intimate terms with Palmer, under whose management the Orchard Street theatre was filled with a succession of the best histrionic talent of the day.

All these seem considerations to be taken into account in explanation of the transformation of Gainsborough as an artist, which certainly took place soon after his arrival in Bath—a transformation which was presently to appear most convincingly in his painting. But perhaps the most important of all has yet to be mentioned. It is certain that Gainsborough was influenced in his early work by the sight or the study of the work of some of the Dutch painters like Wynants and Ruysdael, though no one has ever explained where he found the opportunity of their study. At Bath, however, he was destined to come under the influence of some of the greatest men, notably of Vandyke, and to learn for the first time the possibilities of artistic expression in the terms of pigment and canvas. Thicknesse may have been useful in gaining access for him to one or other of the numerous mansions in the west country which contained galleries of the old masters, and are within easy reach of Bath—at Badminton or Longleat, Bowood or Wilton. At the last named he certainly spent much time during the first few years of his residence at Bath, and “was so fascinated by the great ‘Pembroke Family,’ and spent so many hours before it, that he was able to reproduce it with wonderful fidelity.”

That masterpiece of the great Fleming was probably in better condition when Gainsborough studied it than at present. Waagen asserts that in 1773 it was sent to a Mr. Brompton for restoration. This restoration included apparently a soaking in poppy oil, the taking out of

paint with which the cracks in the varnish had been filled, the repainting of parts of the background, the restoration of decayed glazings, and the coating "with two coats of the best copal varnish."

Gainsborough certainly copied this great work many times: one of these copies was sold after his death for £125, and there were six other copies from works by Vandyke among the pictures he left in London, which show his devotion to that master. His admiration, indeed, for the painter was proverbial during his lifetime. Reynolds once said that Gainsborough copied Vandyke so perfectly that his copies could scarce be distinguished from the originals, and it seems certain that he died with the name of the painter on his lips. The obvious influence of Vandyke upon his own art is recognisable in a score of his finest works.

Among the inducements which the thoughtful Thicknesse offered to Gainsborough as a reason for making the great change from Ipswich to the western watering place, was the offer of sitting for his own portrait. "My head," says he, "was to be held up as the decoy duck, but the first sitting, not above fifteen minutes, is all that has ever been done to it, and in that state it hangs up in my house to this day."

The failure of Gainsborough to finish a portrait of the Governor became a stumbling-block in the intercourse between the two men, and was the centre of a grievance on the part of the latter which lasted many years, and will require our consideration on a later page. Here we note that a sudden flow of business and prosperity was the chief cause of Gainsborough's lamentable neglect. After the first sitting, which the Governor has plaintively recorded, the further progress of the portrait was interrupted by a surprising stream of sitters to the

painter's studio—a patronage which seems to have been quite independent of the Governor's well-meant assistance in the matter of introductions, and was certainly no result of the "decoy duck." "There were unmistakable rumours in the rooms," says Fulcher, "that the painter in the Circus was a clever fellow. It was reported that he could paint a head as well as Mr. Hoare," and, as Thicknesse himself reports, "business came in so fast that he was obliged to raise his price for a head from five to eight guineas"—a state of things which led to the final neglect of the decoy duck altogether.

A certain interest thus attaches to Hoare as Gainsborough's chief competitor for the patronage of the fashionables of Bath in 1760, which is not excited by his few known paintings. William Hoare was himself a Suffolk man, having been born at Eye in 1706. He had early affected the Italian taste, then in such favour in England, and had studied under Grisoni, a painter of that nationality in London. Later he went to Rome, where as the pupil of Francesco Imperiale he embraced the faith of the decadent school of Italian painting, in whose hands the great art of Italy had suffered debasement and attenuation since the days of Guido. Hoare associated much with Pompeo Battoni, the fashionable but incompetent artist, who attracted most of the patronage of the travelling amateurs at Rome during the middle years of the eighteenth century. Hoare's want of success in the grand style in London was partly compensated by a moderate success as a portraitist in crayon and pastel in Bath. He was one of the original members of the Royal Academy, and sent regularly to its exhibitions until his death, in 1792. But we imagine that his prosperity was greatly modified by the appearance of Gainsborough in the city which he had chosen as his place of practice. Certainly Gainsborough himself was

fortunate in finding no more dangerous rival in the city than Mr. Hoare.

As in the case of Joshua Reynolds, who seven years earlier had stepped at once into a great and lucrative practice as a portrait painter in London, Gainsborough encountered little of the period of struggle and anxiety which awaits most of those who depend upon the arts for their livelihood. In the case of both painters, the period of qualification and probation had been passed without the grinding necessity of the inexorable pot-boiler. The early portraits which Reynolds had painted among the squires and yeomen of Devonshire, or of the military men at Minorca, had been auxiliary only to the funds which his friends had contributed to enable him to spend those fruitful years in Italy. So, too, with Gainsborough: the two hundred a year of his wife kept him in comfort, if not in affluence, when his needs and his opportunities of expenditure were few, and, by removing any necessity for the ignoble work by which so many artists are compelled to earn their first crust, enabled him to follow his own inclinations, and to acquire that equipment, both in outlook and in execution, which fitted him to make the most of the opportunities which were awaiting him in Bath. That equipment was more complete in one case than in the other, it is true. Reynolds's style was already formed when he set up his easel in St. Martin's Lane, and among the canvases which he painted during the first few years in London may be found some portraits which may almost claim to represent the fullest development of his art. With Gainsborough the move to Bath was the last and most important phase of his artistic education. The limitations of his environment appear in everything he painted in Suffolk. All that came from his pencil at Bath is stamped unmistakably with the impress of the develop-





RICHARD, EARL GROSVENOR



ment of his genius which followed his residence in that city. To the eager and strenuous temperament of the full-blooded young man came all the glitter and sensuousness of that high-bred life with which he was surrounded for the first time. His innate love of the beautiful enabled him to recognise pictorial possibilities in this refinement of humanity of which he had never dreamed in Suffolk, and the works of his great predecessors in the galleries of Wilton or of the other great houses of the west country taught him other possibilities in the technical and decorative aspects of his art. The result of the influences we have endeavoured to trace, which were brought to bear upon him by his removal from Ipswich, is the Gainsborough we know, the painter of the Mrs. Graham and the Blue Boy, the Mrs. Sheridan, the Lady Mulgrave, and the view of the Mall. No figure subject that we know of as from his hand during the Ipswich period would be called a picture; few that he painted after his arrival in Bath are not entitled to that description.

Although the pictures painted by Gainsborough at Bath have generally an unmistakable character of their own, there is often much difficulty in assigning particular examples to particular years, and in labelling portraits with the names of their sitters. This difficulty is owing to the fact that it was seldom the practice of the painters of that time to sign or date their canvases, and that Gainsborough's habit was no exception. The difficulty was not altogether removed when the annual exhibitions of pictures by living artists were instituted in London, for his portraits were usually described in the catalogues by some indefinite title. It follows that many "Portraits of Gentlemen" or of "Ladies" from his pencil have only been identified, except in cases where their features were already public property by distinctions of eminence or

notoriety, by the notes of contemporary connoisseurs in the catalogues.

Gainsborough was in one respect very fortunate in the time of his starting portraiture in Bath, in that it coincided with the institution of public exhibitions of paintings in England. Although he could scarcely be called a provincial artist at Bath (for the company which assembled there during the season was as representative and metropolitan, even cosmopolitan, as any in London), yet the new annual exhibitions in London gave him the opportunity of appealing to two separate publics in a twelvemonth. These were the fashionables at Bath who employed him, and the other people of fashion in London who at present flocked chiefly to Mr. Reynolds's painting-room in Leicester Fields, but who later were quite ready to accept Mr. Gainsborough also. The exhibitions, indeed, enabled Gainsborough to make his work familiar to the small public in London, whose suffrages were the only source of encouragement for a portrait painter, with the result that when, twelve or fourteen years later, the time came for him to quit Bath, he took his place in London with little more disturbance of his professional life than was involved in the thirty hours' journey by coach.

The institution of exhibitions of contemporary art had followed the growing association of artists with each other in London which we have already noticed in their origin at the studios of individuals, and at schools like that in St. Martin's Lane. The first exhibition on record, that of 1755, was the result of the charity of the London artists, headed by no less an artistic light than William Hogarth.

Hogarth had presented to the Foundling Hospital his full-length portrait of its founder, Captain Coram, his "Moses before Pharaoh's Daughter," and a number



of tickets in the lottery for "The March of the Guards to Finchley," which resulted in that picture becoming the property of the Hospital. His generous example was imitated by other living artists—Hayman, Wills, Highmore, Hudson, Ramsay, Lambert, Wilson, and Pine—and the collection thus formed was thrown open to the public.

Hogarth had in view a larger scheme for the benefit of the Hospital—a design of decorating the building by a combination of painters, sculptors, and architects. A committee was formed for the purpose of taking this object into consideration. Though the scheme was for some reason abandoned, this committee of artists was not dissolved, but continued to meet annually on the 5th November, when they were accustomed to dine together and spend a social evening. The public interest which was excited by the exhibition of the Foundling pictures in 1755 decided this committee to organise an exhibition of the work of artists living in 1760 on a more extended scale. This they opened on the 21st April at the Great Room of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce, in the Strand. There was a charge of sixpence for the catalogue, but none for admission. The artists mustered altogether seventy-four works. Hogarth held aloof, but the show included some well-known works by other men: Reynolds, for example, sent the portrait of one of the famous Gunnings, the whole-length of the Duchess of Hamilton, and the three-quarter length of Lady Elizabeth Keppel, with two less known portraits. Richard Wilson's "Niobe" was among the landscapes. Hayman sent his portrait of Garrick as Richard the Third; there were landscapes by the three Smiths of Chichester; and Roubilliac was represented by a work which is quite typical of his rather flamboyant style of

sculpture—the Shakespeare which he executed for Mr. Garrick's villa at Hampton, and which may be seen to this day in the vestibule of the British Museum, to which institution it was bequeathed by the actor.

In the circumstances of his change of habitation, it is not surprising that we find Gainsborough unrepresented at the exhibition of 1760. But from 1761 onwards his portraits were important contributions to each succeeding exhibition, and were annually expected with interest by connoisseurs like Horace Walpole, from whose annotations to the annual catalogues, indeed, a great number of the painter's anonymous portraits have since been identified with their sitters.

His first contribution to these catalogues was when in 1761 he sent the whole-length of Robert Craggs Nugent, later Lord Clare and Earl Nugent. Nugent was an eminently notable man, and his portrait may be regarded as the first of those representations of his contemporaries which make so much of Gainsborough's portraiture a record of the life of his times. Nugent had a house in the North Parade in Bath, and was close on sixty when he sat for the painter. He was one of those Irish placemen who cut so great a figure in the politics of the last century, and combined with his political accomplishments a perfect genius for marrying rich and moribund ladies. He started life with a fortune of fifteen hundred a year, and died a millionaire. His first wife, a daughter of Lord Fingall, died in 1731, a year after their nuptials. Six years later, Nugent espoused a lady originally a Miss Craggs, daughter of the famous Postmaster-General, and sister of the more famous James, the Secretary of State. This lady, however, had already twice changed her name before becoming Mrs. Nugent, when she brought to her third the accumulations of two rich husbands, as well as her

large original fortune. Nugent by this marriage became the owner of a whole parish, that of Gosfield in Essex, of a seat in Parliament, and of £100,000 in cash besides. The lady died twenty years later, and in the following year he married the daughter of Henry Drax of Charlborough, and widow of the fourth Earl of Berkeley, with whom he acquired a further large fortune.

Nugent, as the owner of the borough of St. Mawes in Cornwall, had a finger in every political pie between 1741 and 1784. He had no principles, and was frankly at the disposal of the highest bidder. He lent large sums to the interesting Frederick Prince of Wales, which, though never repaid, proved an excellent investment for the Irishman, as the source of the places and titles which were bestowed upon him during a quarter of a century by the Prince's grandson, King George the Third. Nugent in the House of Commons was tolerated as an amusing buffoon, and often appears in the pages of Wraxall in that capacity. He was called "Old remote from liberty and truth," from the first line of a poem published in his name but written by a more accomplished man, in which he describes his conversion to the Protestant from the Catholic faith; though it is noteworthy and quite characteristic of the man that he was reconverted again before his death.

Wraxall tells us how Nugent's London house was ransacked by burglars, by whose depredations he lost many pairs of lace ruffles. When, after the fall of North's Ministry, the Whigs became resplendent in dress, in exchange for the sober colours they had worn in sympathy with the American colonists, Nugent related his loss to the House, and told the Speaker he thought he saw many of his missing ruffles on the persons of honourable gentlemen opposite. He professed a great desire to bring Mr. Pitt and Mr. Charles Fox together

in 1784, and from his place in the House offered the pair a dinner, at which, as he said, "they might both get gloriously drunk." He affected, indeed, the character of the typical frank and rollicking Irishman, but was in reality a scheming and unprincipled but able man. He is best remembered, perhaps, as the friend of Goldsmith, whose acquaintance he made on the appearance of the "Traveller," a friendship which is commemorated in the "Haunch of Venison."

Gainsborough painted Lord Nugent twice. The portrait exhibited in 1761 went to Stowe, the Marquess of Buckingham having married Nugent's daughter. At the Stowe sale in 1848 it was bought by Field Marshal Sir George Nugent for £106, who also possesses the portrait of Nugent's son, Colonel Nugent, exhibited by Gainsborough in 1765. The second portrait of Lord Nugent is in the possession of the Corporation of Bristol, for which borough he sat for twenty years ending in 1774.

Gainsborough in 1762 again sent only a single contribution to the exhibition—the portrait of William Poyntz, the squire of Midgham, Berkshire, who is painted as a sportsman with a gun and sitting under a tree; a portrait well known from the small engraving published in Messrs. Graves's series of the works of the painter.

The painting of Mr. Poyntz's portrait most probably led to the sittings which followed of Lord and Lady Spencer, and of their young daughter Georgiana, afterwards so famous as the beautiful Duchess of Devonshire, the Countess being sister to Mr. Poyntz. The three portraits mentioned are all of this period, and although not exhibited were probably painted in 1762 or 1763. The Earl and Countess are bust portraits only, the pictures being a pair. Lady Georgiana Spencer is painted as a very young child. The portrait of the





COUNTESS SPENCER



Countess is considered one of the finest of Gainsborough's less ambitious portraits, and the three are of great interest as establishing his connection with that great family.

The marriage of this young couple in 1755 had created a great sensation, even in those days when functions of the sort were not rare. An eye-witness told J. T. Smith of the procession in London. "The bride followed in a new sedan chair lined with white satin, a black page walking before and three footmen behind, all in the most superb liveries. The diamonds worn by the newly-married pair were presented to Mr. Spencer by Sarah Duchess of Marlborough, and were worth £100,000. The shoe-buckles of the bridegroom alone were worth £30,000." The year after the marriage Mrs. Delany met "Mrs. Spencer, one of the finest figures I ever saw, in white and silver with all her jewels and scarlet decorations; her modest unaffected air gives a lustre to all her finery, that would be only tinsel without it." Another lady declared that young Mr. Spencer "might spend £30,000 a year without hurting himself," and the home-coming of this fortunate couple seems certainly to have been on a scale suitable to such wealth. Lady Hervey relates that when the wedding party made the journey from London to Althorp in three coaches, each with six horses, and two hundred horsemen as an escort, the villages through which they passed were in the greatest alarm, some of the people shutting themselves in their houses, and others coming out with pitchforks, spits, and spades, crying out, "The invasion is come," and believing that the Pretender and the King of France had both come together. Great relief, we are told, was expressed when the cavalcade passed without setting fire to the houses or murdering the inhabitants. It is

pleasant to remember that the great anticipations excited by this happy union were fulfilled in the lives of the Earl and Countess. He is remembered as a liberal patron of the arts, and as the founder of the magnificent collection at Althorp.

The exhibition of 1763 contained three works by Gainsborough—a whole-length of Quin, the actor; portrait of a gentleman, a whole-length identified by Fulcher as a portrait of Mr. Medlicott, "the gay and gallant cousin of Richard Lovell Edgeworth"; and a landscape not identified. Edgeworth, as we have seen, was a friend of Humphrey Gainsborough, the painter's brother, which may have led to the sitting by Medlicott, if indeed the picture is of that gentleman.

Quin sat thrice for Gainsborough, and the three portraits of the actor may be regarded as the memorial of the strong intimacy which existed between them. There was much in common between the jovial witty actor, fond of a coarse joke, and the painter with the same tastes, and they were much together during the last years of the actor's life, which were spent at Bath. Quin's will contained a clause bequeathing £50 to "Mr. Thomas Gainsborough, limner, now living at Bath," and we shall have something to say of their intimacy in trying to trace Gainsborough's life in that city.

The picture exhibited in London is that belonging to the Duke of Cleveland, who bought it at the Wiltshire sale in 1867. It represents the actor sitting in a chair with a volume of plays in his hand, and the composition and illumination recall somewhat the portrait of Orpin, the parish clerk, in the National Gallery. Quin at this time was nearing the end of his life, and, according to Fulcher, expressed a great reluctance to sit to the painter, who observed, "If you will let me take your likeness, I shall live for ever," when the actor gave way



and consented. The incident may be true, and the hesitation may have been caused by the affection of the skin from which Quin suffered in his later years. The picture passed into the possession of Wiltshire, with many other works of the painter, under circumstances which we notice elsewhere; and Fulcher represents Quin, Wiltshire, and the painter as boon companions at this time. The King possesses the other portrait of the actor by Gainsborough, which now hangs in Buckingham Palace.

Gainsborough's unfortunate habit of exhibiting his works without names prevents any identification of the full-length "Portrait of a Gentleman" which he sent to the exhibition of 1764. In the following year, 1765, he contributed the full-length of Colonel Nugent, son of the first Lord, which we have mentioned already, and the large equestrian portrait of General Philip Honywood.

Honywood was the representative of a younger branch of the notable family of baronets long settled in Kent, who lived on an estate of his own in Essex called Marks Hall. He was not particularly distinguished as a soldier, but he was the governor of the citadel of Kingston-upon-Hull, and sat for the borough of Appleby for thirty-one years.

Nasted, the historian of Kent, tells us that a large library was added to Marks Hall in order to accommodate this large canvas, which Londoners had an opportunity of seeing in 1902, when it appeared at the Guildhall Exhibition at the top of the staircase. It represents a gentleman of genial and imposing aspect, in a scarlet uniform and laced hat, with his sword drawn but with no scabbard, riding a bay horse through a wooded landscape. This landscape, says Nasted, is a part of the park at Marks Hall. The picture made some stir when it appeared in London in 1765. Walpole wrote in his

catalogue "Very good," and we learn from Fulcher that King George expressed a great desire to become its possessor.

This work shows a departure from any previous portrait by the painter, and is as good an illustration as need be of the great transformation wrought in his artistic understanding and practice by his removal to Bath. The character of the sitter is most admirably suggested, and the background is very finely conceived and painted, without at all competing for notice with the subject. It is perhaps the first of those notable backgrounds in which the painter employed landscape with such mastery to complete the patterns of his portraits, and in which the literal rendering of natural detail begins to be modified, though there is a very convincing representation of the stem of a silver birch. It is remarkable, too, as an early instance of Gainsborough's great skill in the management of large masses of bright colour. It is possible that this portrait may have been suggested to Gainsborough by the exhibition in 1761 of Reynolds's large equestrian portrait of Lord Ligonier, now in the National Gallery. The theory is most interesting and plausible. Some letters of Gainsborough, which we shall examine later, prove beyond doubt that he was by no means anchored in Bath, as has been supposed by some of his biographers. It is almost certain that he chose the annual exhibitions for an opportunity of visiting London, and the mild competition between himself and Reynolds which appears in the choice of subject and treatment in this and other canvases may quite well have been the result of these visits. In the particular case under notice, Gainsborough certainly got the better of the contest. The *Honywood* is a finer picture than the *Ligonier*, but it is fair to remember that Reynolds had the difficult task of making his sitter

appear a younger man by twenty years than he was at the time, which seems some excuse for some of the deficiencies of his portrait.

Reynolds in 1762 had exhibited the well-known portrait of Garrick between the figures of Tragedy and Comedy, which again may have inspired Gainsborough with the wish of painting that great actor. In any case, the most striking canvas of the four he sent to the exhibition of 1766 was the portrait of Garrick now at Stratford-on-Avon, exhibited as a "Portrait of a Gentleman." The others were another whole-length of a gentleman, a group of a lady and gentleman, and a "large landskip with figures," all of which are unidentified.

This was the first of the six portraits of Garrick by the painter, and is well known from the engraving by Valentine Green. The actor stands leaning against a pedestal surmounted by a bust of Shakespeare, which he encircles with his arm. The pedestal is overshadowed by foliage, and the background includes a representation of the famous Palladian summer house and bridge in Wilton Park. "Mrs. Garrick," says Fulcher, "declared it was the best portrait of 'her Davy' ever painted." The picture is certainly admirably painted, and is no doubt a good portrait, and it is accepted as one of the painter's successes. But the design and the attitude seem false and affected to some of us, even for so self-conscious a personality as an actor, and David Garrick at that. It hangs in the Town Hall at Stratford in a very poor light, and is in admirable preservation.

Much misunderstanding has arisen as to the circumstances in which this portrait went to Stratford-on-Avon. This is entirely owing to Mr. Fulcher, who quotes a Mr. Wheler, the author of a very indifferent

guide to the town, and adopts a quite unworthy suggestion against Garrick's good faith made by that gentleman. Wheler, misreading an entry in the account books of the Corporation of Stratford, conjectures that Garrick claimed credit for having presented his portrait to the town, while as a fact the picture was purchased by the Corporation from Gainsborough himself, to whom they paid his full fee. Fulcher more or less adopts this reading of the facts, and has thereby perpetuated a very unworthy suggestion, which seems to the present writer totally groundless. The note in which he deals with the matter should be quoted here, because other biographers have accepted Fulcher's careless handling of the facts, and in so doing have done an injustice to Garrick's memory.

Says Fulcher:—"We have stated that Garrick presented this picture to the Corporation of Stratford-on-Avon. The matter is, however, involved in some obscurity. Mr. Wheler, in his history of Stratford, describing the Great Room in the Town Hall, says:

"At the south end is a whole-length painting by Gainsborough of David Garrick, and at the north end one of Shakespeare by Wilson, . . . presented by Garrick in 1769. . .

"Garrick presented to the Corporation his own picture, which formerly adorned his seat at Hampton. The Corporation themselves paid Mr. Wilson for the painting of Shakespeare. In the Corporation accounts for the year 1769 are the following items:

'To Mr. Gainsborough for Mr. Garrick's picture £63  
To Mr. Wilson for a picture frame to the  
picture of David Garrick, Esqr. . . . £74'

It has been conjectured that the Corporation paid for both pictures, but that, in order that Garrick might enjoy



the credit of having presented a picture of Shakespeare, as stated on the bard's statue without the Hall, the sum of £74 paid to Wilson was entered as paid for the frame, which is indeed of elaborate workmanship."

This rigmarole would be unworthy of notice were it not for the insinuation against Garrick's good faith which it contains, and but for the fact that it has formed a text for portentous head-shaking at Garrick's moral delinquencies by almost all the biographers of Gainsborough, who have followed Mr. Fulcher in his stupid mistake of quoting Mr. Wheler as an authority. Mr. Wheler was the first to claim for Garrick that he presented his own portrait to the Corporation, and he refutes his own statement by quoting the Corporation records. These show that the Corporation paid for a portrait of Garrick, which no one but Mr. Wheler and his followers ever doubted, and that they paid £74 to Benjamin Wilson, the artist of the picture of Shakespeare which Garrick did present, for the elaborate frame in which Gainsborough's portrait of the actor is still to be seen. The inscription on the outside of the Town Hall, which has been there for nearly a century and a half, might, one would have thought, have prevented these mistakes and injurious insinuations. When in 1768 the Town Hall was rebuilt, Garrick presented the statue of Shakespeare, still to be seen standing in a niche over the doorway, with a tablet below bearing the following inscription :

"The Corporation and Inhabitants of Stratford, assisted by the Munificent Contributions of the Noblemen and Gentlemen in the neighbourhood, rebuilt this edifice in the year 1768.

"The Statue of Shakespeare and his Picture within were given by David Garrick, Esqr."

This inscription, read with the entry in the books of

the Corporation, makes the facts perfectly clear. These are, that Garrick presented the statue of the poet, and the poet's portrait by Benjamin Wilson, to the Corporation; that Garrick's portrait by Gainsborough was paid for by the Corporation in the regular way; and that Benjamin Wilson was employed by the Corporation to provide an elaborate frame, costing £74, for Gainsborough's portrait of the actor. All that has been written by Fulcher and others to the detriment of Garrick's conduct in the matter is pure assumption, founded upon the obscure Mr. Wheler's slovenly reading of the plain facts in his worthless guide.

The unexhibited pictures which Gainsborough painted during the first few years of his residence at Bath are very hard to identify. The best known and the most authentic of these is the head of Orpin, the parish clerk of Bradford-on-Avon, in the National Gallery. This is undoubtedly one of his earliest works at Bath, and has more affinity to the Ipswich portraits than anything we know of painted later. If, as is said, he painted Samuel Richardson, the novelist, the painter's death in 1761 would fix the date of the sitting in the beginning of that year at latest. The portrait of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu mentioned by Mrs. Bell would come in the same early period. Fulcher mentions a portrait of Sterne, once in the possession of the Bishop of Ely, as among the early portraits of the Bath period. The fame which turned the head of that extraordinary divine when his first volume of *Tristram Shandy* appeared, in 1760, doubtless induced him to mix with the fashionables at Bath. Reynolds painted his wonderful head of Sterne in that year, and Gainsborough would naturally seize any opportunity which presented itself of recording his impression of the features of so famous a sitter.

From the arrival at Bath, too, date those numerous



DAVID GARRICK





landscapes and scenes of rural life which so often appear at exhibitions and are so typical of one phase of Gainsborough's art. These he seldom sold, and they were the product of the opportunities which a cessation in the stream of sitters to his painting-room gave him for indulging his love of landscape and rural life. The more famous of these, however—the "Market Cart" of the National Gallery, or the "Harvest Wagon" in Lord Tweedmouth's collection, or the "Cottage Door" of the Duke of Westminster—were painted much later in the Bath period.

His earlier landscapes were those in which he seemed to revolt from the tightness of his Suffolk style, by the obtrusive hatching in the tree forms which appears in so much of his landscape. Later he passed to the low tones and solemn abstractions of form and colour, which are seen to such advantage in the great "Watering Place" in the National Gallery.

## CHAPTER IV

### BATH—GAINSBOROUGH AND JACKSON

IT seems easy to give a very plausible guess at Gainsborough's real tastes, if there is truth in the saying that a man is known by his friends. With the exception of poor Joshua Kirby, whose single talent appears to have been employed in the teaching of perspective, every one of the close acquaintances of the painter of whom there is record had a direct connection with music or the stage. He made friends with Giardini, the eminent fiddler, in the early Ipswich days ; to Jackson, the musician of Exeter, he wrote the longest collection of his letters which exists ; George Frederic Abel, the master of the viol da gamba, was one of his first friends at Bath ; through Abel, no doubt, came the intimacy with his partner Johann Christian Bach, who co-operated with Abel in the famous chamber concerts ; Fischer, the haut-boy player, courted Gainsborough's daughter in Bath, and later married her in London. The sitting which Garrick gave to the painter in 1763 or 1764 no doubt led to the intimacy which is preserved in a few letters we shall have occasion to quote. Quin, the actor, had Gainsborough's company as the solace of his last years ; the painter watched the first appearance of the excellent Henderson in Palmer's theatre, and was his friend from that day forward ; and one of the intimates of his latest years was the young Bannister, in whose congenial company he

seems to have renewed much of the engaging spirit of his youth.

It is remarkable that many of these musical and histrionic friends had serious flirtations with the graphic arts, and as a consequence there must have been much mutual advantage in the acquaintance for both parties; certainly no amateur could have sought advice in a better quarter than Gainsborough's painting-room. Jackson himself appears to have had thoughts of relinquishing the profession of composing and the training of choir boys for that of painting, and his work, according to his latest biographer, was not unknown in London as that of "an honorary exhibitor at the Royal Academy." Gainsborough gave him some very practical advice in this connection with a good-nature which was a part of the man's character. Jackson, many years after the painter's death, wrote a character of his friend, in which he was ponderously merry at the expense of Gainsborough's pretensions as a musician, and one shrewd critic has suggested, with some reason, that this attitude may have been the result of the painter's depreciation of the musician's own efforts with the palette and pencil. Bach and Abel, though not given to the practice of painting, both possessed a taste in the arts, which they were accustomed to gratify by the acquisition of the painter's sketches on the easiest of terms. Henderson was a quite competent draughtsman; he made etchings for Fournier's "Theory of Perspective," under whom, indeed, he had studied, and in 1767 gained a premium for a drawing which he exhibited at the exhibition of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts and Sciences. Jack Bannister began life as a student of the Royal Academy. Garrick may quite possibly have consulted Gainsborough about the scenic effects at his theatre; at any rate, the painter was ready with some interesting advice upon that subject.

Jackson is the first of these acquaintances who claims our notice, if only on account of the letters from Gainsborough, which were the result of their friendship, and were preserved in the musician's family. In the unfortunate dearth of documentary material bearing upon the life of the painter, these letters have a value more than ordinary. They give, moreover, some very interesting indications of Gainsborough's views upon men and things. The letters are the property of the Royal Academy, and have a very clear pedigree. They were originally found in a portfolio with a collection of drawings made by Mr. Thomas Jackson, the brother of the musician, who was minister at Turin in 1780. This gentleman's nephew, Mr. Elmsley, Q.C., who was County Court Judge at Derby, and died in 1862, bequeathed them to his niece, Miss J. Ballard, from whom they were acquired by the Academy.

Their recipient, William Jackson of Exeter, was the son of a grocer of that town, afterwards master of the workhouse. William received his first musical training in the cathedral under the organist, John Silvester, but in 1748 went to London to become the pupil of John Travers of the Chapel Royal. He soon turned to the composition of original works, church music, cantatas, and the like, and in 1767 produced *Lycidas* at Covent Garden, upon the occasion of the death of the Duke of York and Albany. He made his headquarters in Exeter, however, though he was a member of musical bodies in London like the Madrigal Society, at whose meetings he regularly attended. His chief source of income was the teaching of music in his native town until Michaelmas of 1777, when he was appointed sub-chanter, organist, and choirmaster in the cathedral.

Jackson a few years later wrote the music to General Burgoyne's libretto of the *Lord of the Manor*, a work



which brought him some fame. In later years he formed a literary society in Exeter, where each member read some original composition at the meetings at the Globe Inn in Fore Street, and he was accepted as one of the minor literary lights of his day. He was intimate with the Sheridans, who introduced him at the age of seventy to Samuel Rogers, whom he somehow induced to act as his literary executor. The renowned Wolcot was another of his friends, and those who knew him have described his manners as social and communicative. His music is almost forgotten now, though one of his church services is often heard in country churches. Experts declare that his music generally has refinement and grace, but little character. Gainsborough, however, as is manifest from some of his letters, had a great opinion of Jackson's ability.

These letters are mostly undated, but the greater number of them belong obviously to the earlier years of Gainsborough's residence in Bath, up to and including 1768. They are set out in the probable order of date in which they were written, and one written later from London is included for convenience in this chapter.

"MY DEAR JACKSON,—I will suppose all you say about my exhibition pictures to be true, because I have not time to dispute it with you. I am much obliged to you, and wish I could spend a few days with you in town. But I have begun a large picture of Tommy Linley and his sister, and cannot come. I suppose you know the boy is bound for Italy the first opportunity.

"Pray, do you remember carrying me to a picture dealer's somewhere near Hanover Square, and my being struck with the leaving and touch of a little bit of tree? The whole picture was not above eight or ten inches high, and about a foot long. I wish, if you had time, that you

would inquire what it might be purchased for, and give me one line more whilst you stay in town.

"If you can come this way home, we may enjoy a day or two of your company. I can always make up one bed for a friend without any trouble, and nobody has a better claim to that title than yourself.—Believe me, dear Jackson, yours most sincerely,

"THO. GAINSBOROUGH.

"*May 11th, 1768.*

"My compliments to all inquiring friends, and damn this pen."

"BATH, *Aug. 23.*

"MY DEAR JACKSON,—Will it (damn this pen), will it serve as an apology for not answering your last obliging letter, to inform you that I did not receive it for near a month after it arrived, shut up in a music book at Mr. Palmer's? I admire your notions of most things, and do agree with you that there might be exceeding pretty pictures painted of the kind you mention. But are you sure you don't mean, instead of the "Flight into Egypt," my Flight out of Bath? Do you consider, my dear maggoty sir, what a deal of work history pictures require, to what little dirty subjects of coal horses and jackasses and such figures as I fill up with?

"No, you don't consider anything about that part of the story; you design faster than any man or any thousand men would execute. There is but one flight I should like to paint, and that's yours out of Exeter; for while your numerous and polite acquaintances encourage you to talk so cleverly, we shall have but few productions, real substantial productions. But to be serious, as I know you love to be, do you really think that a regular composition in the Landskip way should ever be filled with history, or any figures but such as fill a

place—I won't say stop a gap—or create a little business for the eye to be drawn from the trees in order to return to them with more glee?

“I did not know you admired these tragi-comic pictures, because some have thought that a regular history picture may have too much background and the composition be hurt by not considering what ought to be the principal. But I talk now like old Squaretoes. There is no rule of that kind, say you,

“But then says I,  
Damme, you lie.

“If I had but room and time before old Palmer seals up his packet, I'd trim you. I have been riding out with him this morning; I wish I had been with him in Devonshire. Adieu,  
T. G.”

This letter is evidently an answer to one from Jackson, urging what was known at that time as the grand gusto upon the painter. Reynolds was the prophet of the grand gusto in England, and its beauties were the theme of many of his discourses delivered at the Academy, though the few essays he made in the practice were performed with only indifferent success. Hogarth, too, had demonstrated how a master who treated the subjects he saw and felt with something amounting to inspiration could be mediocre and almost commonplace when he sought to reproduce the religious fervour of other and exotic schools of painting in such works as the “Pool of Bethesda” or “Paul before Felix.” Later came Mr. West, and the turbulent Barry with his grand scheme of decorating the Great Room of the Adelphi; later still, the enterprise of Alderman Boydell, who, in his Shakespeare Gallery, set out to prove that the native school of painting was capable of the highest flights in

historical and imaginative painting, and succeeded, as most people are agreed to-day, in establishing the exact contrary. One wonders what has become of those acres of painting in the grand style which his artists turned out with such fervour at the end of the century—Reynolds and Northcote, Romney, Barry, Haydon, and Mr. West. One sees prints from these efforts regularly at Christie's and Sotheby's, in which dealers profess but a languid interest, but no hanging committee of a winter exhibition at Burlington House is ever bold enough to attempt the resurrection of an original. The annals of the first century of the English school of painting is a record of disaster in the pursuit of the grand gusto: one is thankful that Gainsborough, unlike his rivals Reynolds and Romney, added nothing to the tale. His native shrewdness kept him to the subjects he could paint and live by, to his great advantage and our own.

“MY DEAR JACKSON,—To show you that I can be as quick as yourself, tho' I shall never be half as clever, I am answering your letter the very moment I received it from Mr. Palmer. I shall not teaze you upon the subject of the Flight, as we are now upon a better, and that which, above all, I have long wished to touch upon; because, tho' I'm a rogue in talking about painting, and love to seem to take things wrong, I can be both serious and honest upon any subjects thoroughly pleasing to me, and such will ever be those wherein your happiness and our friendship are concerned.

“Let me, then, throw aside that damned grinning trick of mine for a moment, and be as serious and stupid as a horse. Mark, then, that ever since I have been quite clear in your being a real genius, so long have I been of opinion that you are daily throwing away your gift upon gentlemen, and only studying how you shall





LADY EDEN



become the gentleman too. Now, damn gentlemen, there is not such a set of enemies to a real artist in the world as they are, if not kept at a proper distance.

"They think, and so may you for a while, that they reward your merit by their company and notice; but I, who blow away all the chaff (and, by G—, in their eyes too, if they don't stand clear), know that they have but one part worth looking at, and that is their purse; their hearts are seldom near enough the right place to get a sight of it. If any gentlemen come to my house, my man asks them if they want me (provided they don't seem satisfied with seeing the pictures), and then he asks *what* they would please to want with me; if they say a picture,—'Sir, please to walk this way, and my master will speak to you'; but if they only want me to bow and compliment,—'Sir, my master is walk'd out'; and so, my dear, there I nick them. Now, if a lady, a handsome lady, comes, 'tis as much as his life is worth to send her away so. . . .

"I wish you liv'd a little nearer, so that I could see you often, or a good deal nearer, if you please. I have no acquaintance now, nor will I till I can say within myself, 'I approve my choice.' There are but few clever fellows worth hanging, and that consideration makes you the more worthy.

"Adieu for want of room; I'll write again very soon.

"T. G.

"BATH, *Sept.* 2, 1769."

"BATH, *Sept.* 14<sup>th</sup> (1769).

"MY DEAR JACKSON,—Now you seem to lay too much stress upon me, and show yourself to be a serious fellow. I question, if you could splice all my letters together, whether you could find more connection and sense in them than in many landskips joined, where half

a tree was to meet half a church to make a principal object. I should not think of pretending to reproach you, who are a regular system of philosophy, a reasonable creature, and a particular fellow. If I meant anything (which God knows if I did), it is this, that many a real genius is lost in the fictitious character of the gentleman, and that, as many of these creatures are continually courting you, possibly you might forget, what I without any merit to myself remember from mere shyness, namely, that they make no part of the artist.

“Depend upon it, Jackson, you have more sense in your little finger than I have in my whole body and head; I am the most inconsistent changeable being, so full of fits and starts, that if you mind what I say, it will be shutting your eyes to some purpose. I’m only sensible of meaning, and of having once said, that I wished you lived nearer to me; but that this wish does not proceed from a selfishness rather than any desire of correcting any step of yours, I much doubt. I might add perhaps in my red-hot way, that, damme, Exeter is no more a place for a Jackson than Sudbury in Suffolk is for a G. For all the rest you know better than I can tell you, I’m certain. You have one fault, which I must tell you of: you can stop to gaze with wonder and astonishment upon such a fellow as H——y, and let slip all his merit of care, labour, and prudent selfishness through your own fingers.

“I look upon this letter as one of my most agreeable performances, so don’t let’s have any of your airs. I could say a deal more; but what can a man say, pent up in a corner thus?—Yours,

T. G.

“William Shakespeare Jackson, Esqr.”



"DEAR JACKSON,—Is it true that you broke your neck in going home? I have not seen Palmer, but only the day after your departure, to learn the truth. It is a current report here that the great and amiable Mr. Jackson got a mischief in going home, that you had tied your horse by the head so fast that his head was dragged off in going down a hill, and that you ordered the driver (like a near-sighted man) to go back for the horse's body, and that the chaise horses, frightened at the sight of the boy's riding up upon a horse without a head, took fright and made for Exeter, and that you, unwilling to leave your horse in that condition, took a flying leap out of the window, and pitched head foremost into a hollow tree.

"Miss D——I has heard this story, and says if it be true she'll never touch a note again. I hope to hear either from Palmer or Bearing, when I see them, a favourable account of you. I'm but little disposed to pity you, because you slip'd away so dam'd sly without giving me any more time than you had to jump into the hollow tree. Pray, have your damn'd long fingers escaped? Let's hear from you soon, and in the meantime I'll pray that it's all a lie.

"BATH, *Feb. 6th.*

"Will you meet me in London any time, and I'll order business accordingly?"

"DEAR JACKSON,—If your neck is but safe, damn your horse's head. I am so pleased with both your remarks and your indigo, that I know not which to admire most, or which to think of most immediate use: the indigo you leave me in doubt whether there be any more to be got, whereas I am pretty sure of some more of your thoughts, now we are fairly settled into a correspondence; your observations are like all yours, just,

natural, and not common ; your indigo is clean like your understanding, and pure as your music, not to say exactly of the same blue as that heaven from which your ideas are reflected.

“ To say truth of your indigo, ’tis delightful, so look sharp for some more, and I’ll send you a drawing, and, for your thoughts, I have often flattered myself I was just going to think *so*. The lugging in objects, whether agreeable to the whole or not, is a sign of the least genius of anything, for a person able to collect in the mind will certainly group in the mind also ; and if he can master a number of objects so as to introduce them in a friendship, let him do but a few, and that you know, my boy, makes simplicity.

“ One part of a picture ought to be like the first part of a tune, that you guess what follows, and that marks the second part of the tune, and so I’m done.

“ My respects to Tremlett. Bearing did not call upon me ; I hear he’s gone from Bath.

“ The Harp is packed up to come to you, and you shall take it out with Miss——, as I shall not take anything for it, but give it to you to twang upon when . . . .”

“ MY DEAR JACKSON,—I should have wrote to you sooner, but have been strangely hurried since I left Exeter. In my way home I met with Lord Shelburne, who insisted on my making him a short visit, and I don’t repent going (tho’ I generally do to all Lords’ houses), as I met with Mr. Dunning there. There is something exclusive of the deep and clear understanding of that gentleman most exceedingly pleasing to me. He seems the only man who talks as Giardini plays, if you know what I mean : he puts no more motion than what goes to the real performance, which constitutes that ease and

gentility peculiar to damned clever fellows, each in their way.

"I observe his forehead jets out, and mine runs back a good deal more than common, which accounts for some difference between our parts. . . . He is an amazing compact man in every respect, and, as we get a sight of everything by comparison, only think of the difference betwixt Mr. Dunning almost motionless, with a mind brandishing like lightning from corner to corner of the earth, while a long cross-made fellow only flings his arms about like threshing flails, without half an idea of what he would be at; and besides this neatness in outward appearance, his storerooms seem cleared of all French ornaments and gingerbread work; everything is simplicity and elegance and in its proper place; no disorder or confusion in the furniture, as if he were going to remove. Sober sense and great acuteness are marked very strong in his face; but if these were all I should only admire him as a great lawyer, but there is genius (in our sense of the word) shines in all he says. In short, Mr. Jackson of Exeter, I begin to think there is something in the air of Devonshire that grows clever fellows; I could name 4 or 5 of you superior to the product of any other county in England.

"Pray make my compliments to one lady who is neat about the mouth, if you can guess, and believe me, yours most faithfully,

"THO. GAINSBOROUGH."

This vivid sketch by Gainsborough of the great lawyer makes us deplore the fate which confined the records of his keen powers of observation to the painting of his contemporaries' faces. What, for instance, could surpass a recorded remark of the painter upon young Mr. Pitt, whom he described as sitting on the Treasury

Bench, "with his nose cocked up at all Europe." In this evening spent at Bowood it is clear that the personality of Dunning altogether overpowered that of Shelburne, whose henchman he was. One would have liked Gainsborough's impressions of the extraordinary figure of the patron. Lord Shelburne is a standing example of the disastrous effect upon a public man's career of a want of frankness in address. His private life was admirable, and there is little record of any incident in his political life which could be called dishonourable. Yet he was the best hated man of his day. The "Jesuit of Berkeley Square," as King George called him, distrusted all men, and as a consequence was trusted by none. In all the tortuous politics of those days Shelburne worked like a mole under ground, and, as was wittily said of a similar character, his operations were first discovered by the dirt he threw up on the surface. His political conduct was the very negation of the spirit of loyalty to party. When the Rockingham Ministry came in in 1782, and before half the posts were filled, he went in his own interest to the King, and his colleagues received the first intimation of the fact by seeing his nominee Dunning kiss hands at the levee as a peer of the realm.

There are a hundred stories of the public appreciation of the contrast between his political character and the suavity and urbanity of his address. One of the best is that of Goldsmith and Lord Shelburne at the play, when the audience, taking a point in the performance, acclaimed the peer as Malagrida. "But I did not know that your Lordship was such a very wicked man," said poor Goldsmith. Another delicious one, told by Mrs. Piozzi, relates to Gainsborough himself, which, true or not, deserves record here. The painter is represented as flinging away his pencil, after a second attempt



to make a portrait of Shelburne, with the remark, "Damn it, I never could see through varnish, and there's an end on't."

"MY DEAR JACKSON,—I am much obliged to you for your last letter, and the lessons received before. I think I now begin to see a little into the nature of modulation, and the introduction of flats and sharps; and when we meet you shall hear me play extempore. My friend Abel has been to visit me, but he made but a short stay, being obliged to go to Paris for a month or six weeks, after which he has promised to come again. There never was a poor devil so fond of harmony with so little knowledge of it, so that what you have done is pure charity. I dined with Mr. Duntze in expectation (and indeed full assurance) of hearing your scholar Miss Flond play a little, but was for the second time flung. . . .

"I am sick of portraits, and wish very much to take my viol da gamba and walk off to some sweet village, where I can paint landskip and enjoy the fag end of life in quietness and ease. But these fine ladies and their tea drinkings, dancings, husband huntings, etc. etc. etc. will fob me out of the last ten years, and, I fear, miss getting husbands too. But we can say nothing to these things, you know, Jackson; we must jogg on and be content with the jingling of the bells, only, d—mn it, I hate a dust, the kicking up a dust and being confined in harness to follow the track, whilst others ride in the waggon under the cover, stretching their legs in the straw at ease, and gazing at green trees and blue skies without half my taste. That's d—m'd hard. My comfort is I have five viols da gamba — 3 Jayes and two Barak Normans.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jaye and Barak Norman were celebrated viol-makers.

“Adieu, dear Jackson, and believe me, ever sincerely  
yours,

THO. GAINSBOROUGH.

“BATH, *June 4th.*”

“DEAR JACKSON,—Methinks I hear you say, all friendship is my . . . and all sincerity my . . ., only because I have not had time since my hurry of finishing two full-lengths and a landskip for the exhibition to answer your two last letters. But don't be in a hurry to determine anything about me; if you are, ten to one you are wrong, those who can claim a longer acquaintance with me than Mr. Jackson knowing at this moment but little of my real temper.

“I am heartily sorry that you don't come to reside near Bath, as you expected, not because you are disappointed of the advantage of conversing with me and my books, but because I am deprived of the much greater advantage of sucking your more sensible skull, and of the opportunity I might possibly have of convincing you how much I shall always esteem your various and extensive talents, not to mention what I think still better worth mentioning, namely, your honesty and undesigning plainness and openness of soul.

“They say your mind is not worldly. ‘No,’ said I, ‘because it is heavenly.’ I think a tolerable reason, Master Mathews. . . . I fear, my lad, I shall have it this exhibition, for never was such slight dabs presented to the eyes of a million. But I grow dauntless out of mere stupidity as I grow old, and I believe that any one who plods on in any one way, especially if that one way will bring him bread and cheese, as well as a better, will grow the same.

“Mr. Palmer was going to London the last time I saw him, so I fear it may be some time before you receive this letter.—Adieu, etc.”

“DEAR JACKSON,—I will confess to you that I think it unpardonable in me not to speak seriously upon a subject of so much consequence as that which has employed us of late; therefore you will have my thoughts without any humming, swearing, or affectation of wit. Indeed, my affection for you would naturally have led me that way before now, but that I am soon lost if I pretend to reasoning, and you, being all regularity and judgment, I own provoke me the more to break loose, as he who cannot be correct is apt to direct the eye with a little freedom of handling; but no more of it—I must own your calculations and comparison betwixt our different professions to be just, provided you remember that in mine a man may do great things and starve in a garret, if he does not conquer his passions and conform to the common eye in choosing that branch which they will encourage and pay for.

“Now there cannot be that difference between music and painting, unless you suppose that the musician voluntarily shuns the only popular branch, and will be a chamber council when he might appear at the bar. You see, sir, I’m out of my subject already. But now, in again. If music will not satisfy you without a certainty (which by the way is nonsense, for there is no such thing in any profession), then I say, be a painter. You have more of the painter than half those who get money by it; that I will swear, if you desire it, upon the church Bible. You want a little drawing, and the use of the pencil and colours, which I could put into your hand in one month without meddling with your head. I propose to let that alone, if you’ll let mine off easy. There is a branch of painting next in profit to portrait, and quite within your power, without any more drawing than I’ll answer for your having, which is drapery and landskip backgrounds. Perhaps you don’t know that, whilst a

face painter is harassed to death, the drapery painter sits and earns five or six hundred a year, and laughs all the while.

“Your next will be to tell me what I know as well as yourself, viz., that I am an impertinent coxcomb. This I know, and will speak out if you kill me for it; you are too modest, too diffident, too sensible, and too honest ever to push in music.—Sincerely, T. G.”

The absence of date to this letter makes it uncertain at which period of Jackson's career it was written, but it seems very eloquent of the goodness of heart of the painter, and of the real affection in which he held the musician. Jackson was certainly unsettled at more than one point in his life, and there is a letter of the painter which again shows his friendly interest in his welfare. It was addressed to the Duke of Bedford, and has been quoted to suggest that the familiarity it discloses with that nobleman is evidence as to the connection of his wife, Margaret Burr, with that great family.

“BATH, *May 29th*, 1768.

“MY LORD DUKE,—A most noteworthy honest man, and one of the greatest geniuses for musical composition England ever produced, is now in London, and has got two or three members of Parliament along with him out of Devonshire, to make application for one of the receivers of the land tax of that county, now resigned by a very old man, Mr. Haddy. His name is William Jackson, lives at Exeter, and for plainness, truth, and ingenuity at the same time, is beloved as no man ever was. Your Grace has doubtless heard his compositions, but he is no fiddler—your Grace may take my word for it; he is extremely clever and good, is a married man with a young family, and is qualified over and over for the





LADY DUDLEY



place; has got friends of fortune who will be bound for him in any sum, and they are all making application to his Grace the Duke of Grafton to get him this place. But, my Lord Duke, I told him they could not do it without me, that I must write a letter to your Grace about it. He is at Mr. Arnold's in Norfolk Street in the Strand; and if your Grace would be pleased to think of it, I should ever be bound to pray for your Grace. Your Grace knows that I am an original, and therefore I hope will be more ready to pardon this monstrous freedom, from your Grace's, etc.

"THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH."

"DEAR JACKSON,—I thought you was sick, as I had not seen you for some days, and last night, when I went to the play in the hopes of meeting you there, Mr. Palmer confirmed my fears. I fully intended putting on my thick shoes this morning, but have been hindered by some painter plagues. Pray send me word whether there is any occasion for Doctor Moysey to come to you, in Palmer's opinion—damn your own, for you are too much like me to know how it is with you. The Doctor shall come in a moment if there is the least occasion, and I know he will with pleasure, without your touching your breeches pocket.—So God mend you.

"T. GAINSBOROUGH."

"*Tuesday Morning.*—I have spoilt a fine piece of drawing paper for you because I had no other, and in a hurry to know how you are."

"*Jan. 25th, 1777.*"

"DEAR JACKSON,—I suppose I never drew a portrait half so like the sitter, as my silence since the receipt of your last resembles neglect and ingratitude, owing to

two of the crossest accidents that ever attended a poor fiddler. First, and most unfortunately, I have been four times after Bach, and have never laid eyes upon him ; and secondly, and most provokingly, I have had a parcel made up of two drawings and a box of pencils such as you wrote for, ever since the day after I rec<sup>d</sup>. your favour enclosing the Tenth, and directed for you to go by the Exeter coach, which has laid in my room by the neglect of two blockheads—one my nephew, who is too proud to carry a bundle under his arm, though his betters the journeymen tailors always carry their foul shirts so ; and my d—d cowardly footman, who forsooth is afraid to peep into the street for fear of being pressed for sea service, the only service God Almighty made him for ; so that, my dear Jackson, if it was not for your being endowed with Jobe's patience, I should think myself deservedly for ever shut out of your favour ; but surely I shall catch Bach soon to get you an answer to your letter ; and for the drawings, if I don't carry them myself to the inn to-morrow. . . . There is a letter of nonsense enclosed with the drawings, to plague you once more about 6ths and 10ths.

“ You hear, I suppose, that all Lords and Members have given up their privilege of franking to ease the taxes. I'm sorry for it.”

The pleasing allusion in this letter to Gainsborough's nephew refers of course to his sister Dupont's son, who seems to have joined his uncle as pupil and assistant as soon as he was old enough to profit by his teaching. The lad showed much ability, and left work of great promise both in painting and engraving before his untimely death at the age of about thirty. He was a personable youth, as one judges from the fine head which Gainsborough painted about this time showing him in a



Vandyke habit—a canvas which well bears comparison with the work of that master.

Comment on these letters to Jackson is superfluous ; the general feeling they evoke is regret for the smallness of their number. One thing above all appears in them—the honesty of the man who wrote them, and the generosity of his affection for Jackson. Time has not confirmed Gainsborough's estimate of that musician, but few will begrudge him the eulogies poured upon his genius by his warm-hearted friend, in view of the pleasure the painter manifestly found in his acquaintance and in the study of Jackson's harmless compositions. We may now turn to Jackson's account of his friend, which breathes a different spirit altogether. We may remember, however, that it was written in the musician's declining years, when querulousness is apt to appear in the most amiable of dispositions.

Jackson, on the whole, achieved a fairly prosperous career ; he settled down eventually into a harmless dilettante, and was wont to amuse himself by recording his opinions on many different topics. Three editions of his *Letters* were published during his lifetime, and he wrote with some appearance of authority on a variety of subjects, ranging with easy grace from Shakespeare to the Musical Glasses. Thus, in his volume *The Four Ages*, he delivers himself upon Riches, Quarles's Emblems, Cards and Duelling, Painting, the Parenthesis, Bad Associations, and Homer's Scale of Heroes. It is this work that contains his dissertation upon the character of Gainsborough, and as it is not of undue length and presents many points of interest, it seems convenient to collate it here with the breezy letters which the painter addressed to its author :—

“ In the early part of my life I became acquainted

with Thomas Gainsborough, the painter, and, as his character was perhaps better known to me than to any other person, I will endeavour to divest myself of every partiality, and speak of him as he really was. I am the rather induced to this by seeing accounts of him and his works given by people who were unacquainted with either, and consequently have been mistaken in both.

"Gainsborough's profession was painting, and music was his amusement, yet there were times when music seemed to be his employment and painting his diversion. As his skill in music has been celebrated, I will, before I speak of him as a painter, mention what degree of merit he possessed as a musician.

"When I first knew him he lived at Bath, where Giardini had been exhibiting his then unrivalled powers on the violin. His excellent performance made Gainsborough enamoured of that instrument, and conceiving, like the servant maid in the 'Spectator,' that the music lay in the fiddle, he was frantic until he possessed the very instrument which had given him so much pleasure, but seemed much surprised that the music of it remained behind with Giardini.

"He had scarcely recovered from this shock (for it was a great one to him), when he heard Abel on the viol da gamba. The violin was hung on the willow, Abel's viol da gamba was purchased, and the house resounded with the melodious thirds and fifths from 'morn to dewy eve.' Many an adagio and many a minuet were begun, but none completed. This was wonderful, as it was Abel's own instrument, and therefore ought to have produced Abel's own music.

"Fortunately, my friend's passion had now a new object, Fischer's hautboy, but I do not recollect that he deprived Fischer of his instrument. I never heard him make the least attempt on it. Probably his ear was too

delicate to bear the disagreeable sounds which attended the first playing on a wind instrument. He seemed to content him with what he heard in public, and getting Fischer to play to him in private, not on the hautboy but on the violin; but this was a profound secret, for Fischer knew that his reputation was in danger if he pretended to excel in two instruments.

"The next time I saw Gainsborough it was in the character of King David. He had heard a harper at Bath; the harper was soon left harpless; and now Fischer, Abel, and Giardini were all forgotten, and there was nothing like chords and arpeggios. He really stuck to the harp long enough to play several airs with variations, and in a little time would nearly have exhausted all the pieces usually performed on an instrument incapable of modulation, when another visit from Abel brought him back to the viol da gamba.

"He now saw the imperfection of sudden sounds that instantly die away; if you wanted a staccato, it was to be had with a proper management of the bow, and you might also have notes as long as you please. The viol da gamba is the only instrument, and Abel the prince of musicians.

"This and occasionally a little flirtation with the fiddle continued some years, when, as ill luck would have it, he heard Crosdill, but, by some irregularity of conduct for which I cannot account, he neither took up nor bought the violoncello. All his passion for the bass was vented in descriptions of Crosdill's tone and bowing, which were rapturous and enthusiastic to the last degree.

"More years now passed away, when, upon seeing a theorbo in a picture of Vandyke's, he concluded, perhaps because it was finely painted, that the theorbo must be a fine instrument. He recollected to have heard of a German professor who, though no more, I shall forbear

to name, and ascended *per varios gradus* to his garret, where he found him at dinner upon a roasted apple and smoking a pipe. Says he:

“‘I am come to buy your lute.’

“‘To puy my lude?’

“‘Yes; come, name your price, and here is your money.’

“‘I cannot shell my lude.’

“‘No, not for a guinea or two; but, by God, you must sell it.’

“‘My lude is werth much monnay; it ish wert ten guinea.’

“‘That it is; see, here is the money.’

“‘Well, if I musht; but you will not take it away yourself.’

“‘Yes, yes; good-bye.’

“After he had gone down he came up again.

“‘I have done but half my errand; what is your lute worth if I have not your book?’

“‘What poog, Maishter Gainsborough?’

“‘Why, the book of airs you have composed for the lute.’

“‘Ah, py Got, I can never part with my poog.’

“‘Poh, you can make another at any time; this is the book I mean,’ putting it in his pocket.

“‘Ah, py Got, I cannot.’

“‘Come come, here’s another ten guineas for your book, so once more good-day to ye.’

“He descends again, and again comes up.

“‘But what use is your book to me if I don’t understand it? And your lute, you may take it again if you won’t teach me to play on it. Come home with me and give me my first lesson.’

“‘I will gome to-morrow.’

“‘You must come now.’



“ ‘I musht tresh myshelf.’

“ ‘For what? You are the best figure I have seen to-day.’

“ ‘I musht shave.’

“ ‘I honour your beard.’

“ ‘I musht bud on my wik.’

“ ‘Damn your wig, your cap and beard become you ; do you think if Vandyke was to paint you he’d let you be shaved?’

“In this manner he frittered away his musical talents, and, though possessed of ear, taste, and genius, he never had application enough to learn his notes. He scorned to take the first step, the second was of course out of his reach, and the summit became unattainable.

“He hated the harpsichord and the pianoforte. He disliked singing, particularly in parts. . . . He had as much pleasure in looking at a violin as in hearing it. I have seen him for many minutes surveying in silence the perfections of an instrument from the just proportions of the model and the beauty of the workmanship.

“The indiscriminate admirers of my late friend will consider this sketch of his character as far beneath his merit ; but it must be remembered that my wish was not to make it perfect, but just. The same principle obliges me to add, that as to his common acquaintance, so to his intimate friends, he was sincere and honest, and that his heart was always alive to every feeling of honour and generosity.”

Thus the smug Mr. Jackson of Exeter upon his friend Thomas Gainsborough—the Gainsborough of the letters we have just read, in which adulation is heaped upon the mediocre musician ; the Gainsborough who wrote that hearty letter to the Duke of Bedford when the tuneful one wanted a place in the Excise ; the Gains-

borough who declared that Mr. Jackson's mind was heavenly, and that all his ideas were reflected from the same place. Jackson, let us remember, had his dead friend's letters in his possession at the time he penned this feebly malicious sketch, in which he professes to protect Gainsborough from his "indiscriminate admirers."

Few impartial readers will be deceived by Mr. Jackson's protestations of impartiality with which he opens and closes this attack on his friend's memory. Moreover, the excellent organist of Exeter, in his glib criticism of the volatile amateur and his flirtation with a whole orchestra of instruments, attempts to prove too much. His facetious style, too, does not help him; the most destructive of critics are usually those who make the least attempt to be funny. One wonders how Jackson knew all these details, for it is evident that the pair seldom met, and whether the musician was present at the interview with the lute player, whose name he with such delicacy refrains from printing. The report of that interview certainly does not ring true, and smells somewhat of the lamp.

A short examination of the few other authorities who mention Gainsborough and his musical tastes seems to discredit some of Mr. Jackson's most telling sentences. Thus old Thicknesse's remark upon Gainsborough's proficiency on the violin in the early Ipswich days, which we have already quoted, seems to take much of the humour out of Jackson's story of Gainsborough and Giardini's violin. Did not Thicknesse say that "I would as soon have painted against him as have attempted to fiddle against him"? Thicknesse, too, at Bath speaks of his proficiency in playing the viol da gamba.

Here, too, is a passage from *Wine and Walnuts*,



MRS. MOODY AND CHILDREN





which has a bearing on the question of Gainsborough's musical accomplishments:—

“Fischer, the celebrated performer on the hautboy and favourite of the King, married a fair daughter of the painter, and the two enthusiasts sometimes left their spouses, mama and daughter, each to sleep away more than half the night alone. For one would get at his flageolet, which he played delightfully, and the other at his viol da gamba, and have such an inveterate set to, that, as Mrs. G—— said, a gang of robbers might have stripped the house and set it on fire to boot, and the gentlemen been never the wiser.”

Jackson's ill-natured sketch, written twenty years after his friend's death, happily attracted the notice of Mr. E. F. Rimbault, whose father, Stephen Francis Rimbault, as a boy had met Gainsborough, and remembered his playing perfectly. Mr. E. F. Rimbault wrote to *Notes and Queries* upon the very point, with knowledge gained from that direct source. *Apropos* of Jackson's remark that Gainsborough “hated the harpsichord and the pianoforte,” he said:—

“Gainsborough knew a little of almost every musical instrument such as were used for solo playing, but his chief forte consisted in modulating upon the harpsichord. He was too capricious to study music scientifically, but his ear was so good and his natural taste so refined, that these important adjuncts led him far beyond the mechanical skill of the mere performer who relies upon technical knowledge.”

Harry Angelo, too, has this remark upon Jackson's dissertation:—

“This sprightly sketch of the musical eccentricities of the painter, with all due respect to the memory of Mr. Jackson, is somewhat of a caricature. For Gainsborough not only did know his notes, but could accompany a slow

movement on the harpsichord, both on the fiddle and the flute, with good taste and feeling."

It was Angelo who suggested that if Gainsborough had chosen to record his real opinion of Mr. Jackson's performances with the pencil, he might have had the laugh of the musician. The suggestion perhaps supplies the key to Jackson's old-maidish spite. Notwithstanding Gainsborough's flattering remarks in his letter about Jackson's pictorial abilities, the painter may well in his buoyant moods have rallied the musician on his artistic productions. In any case, the musician had failed in painting, and he seems to have felt it behoved him to prove that the painter had failed in music. Jackson's paper in the *Four Ages* has been the foundation of many lucubrations on the vanity of Gainsborough in his rôle of trifling dilettante. It has claimed greater attention here than it perhaps deserves; but we have dealt with it at length, not because Gainsborough's exact proficiency in music is of any real importance, but because Jackson's picture of the fiddling tomfool is a libel upon an eminently virile character.

## CHAPTER V

### FRIENDS AT BATH

THE scarcity of material, no less than the lack of exact dates on such documents as exist, makes it as difficult to follow Gainsborough's life at Bath as during those earlier years in Suffolk. Thicknesse comes in occasionally as Chorus, but, as befits that character, without any petty details of time. Some memoir writer like Angelo leaves a paragraph recording a visit to the city and a meeting with the painter; Henderson, the actor, makes his appearance at Palmer's theatre; Gainsborough watches him from a box, is interested, strikes up an acquaintance, and writes him a furtive letter or two; Garrick sits for a portrait, and an intimacy recorded in a few other letters is the result; Cunningham or Fulcher rescues some scanty bit of the gossip of his times from the general oblivion: such are the materials upon which our knowledge of the life of one of the greatest of English painters depends.

Of the painter's continuous prosperity there can be no doubt. His studio, Fulcher tells us, was thronged with visitors. "Fortune," said a wit of the day, "seemed to take up her abode with him; his house became gains' borough." It is clear from the tone of his remarks about patrons in one of the letters to Jackson, that there was little of the supple courtier about Gainsborough in his relations with these sitters, and that his practice grew

by the merits of his work alone, and with little help from the urbanity of his own manners. One thinks of Gainsborough as an independent spirit, bored rather with the necessity of painting faces for a living, chafing at the confinement of the painting-room, and longing, as he says in another of those letters, for a quiet village, his viol da gamba, and the painting of "landskip." He was obviously a man of impulse, a fervent and rapid worker when his imagination was touched by a face or the turn of a figure in one of his sitters, but, unlike his rival Reynolds, who could placidly evolve a picture from the meanest countenance, was ever ready to dismiss with a piece of jocular rudeness a sitter who failed to interest him. There is a tradition, repeated by many of the gossips of the time, that the painter was unable to restrain his laughter in the presence of the more homely specimens of humanity among his sitters, and would at times guffaw in their faces. Thicknesse indeed gives, as it were, chapter and verse for one of these meetings, and we see no reason to disbelieve him. We will, as usual, let him speak his own language, upon which we have no hopes of being able to improve :—

"Humourist he certainly was, but in the most pleasant cast of that character, for when a certain rich citizen was sitting to him with his five-guinea new-powdered bob wig on, the chap looked so rum and sat so pretty that poor Gainsborough found it impossible not to burst out into a fit of laughter, and, while he was wishing for some occasion to plead his excuse, the alderman desired him not to overlook the dimple in his chin. No power of face could withstand that. Gainsborough burst forth in laughter, threw his pencil upon the ground, and said, 'Damn the dimple in your chin ; I can neither paint that nor your chin neither,' and never touched the picture more."



Cunningham promotes the alderman to a peer of the realm, without, however, improving the story.

Thicknesse, too, has another story of a similar flavour:—

“When a certain duchess sent to know the reason why her picture was not sent home, he gave it a wipe in the face with his background brush, and sent her word that her Grace was too hard for him; he could not, he said, paint it. That inelegant message lost her an excellent representation of her beautiful person (for she was beautiful), and Gainsborough’s spirit deprived him of a hundred guineas.”

One wonders whether this was the portrait of the Duchess of Devonshire, left unfinished at his death, which after so many surprising adventures has at last reached the haven of the gallery of an American millionaire. The painter Lawrence, or another, who finished it after Gainsborough’s death, may well have removed the ‘wipe of the background brush,’ as a preliminary to that plastering with bituminous colour which the picture at present bears. The objection to the theory is that Gainsborough’s relations with that great family, and the success with which he had previously painted the Duchess herself, render his rudeness improbable. On the other hand, there is a tradition that he was so dissatisfied with one painting of the same lady that he refused to send the portrait to Chatsworth.

The intimacy with Garrick, which perhaps began with the painting of the first of the five portraits of that actor in 1762 or 1763, was continued thereafter, and Gainsborough doubtless took what opportunities he could of seeing Garrick on the stage. A few letters of his to Garrick are included in that gentleman’s published correspondence. A very interesting additional one, which has escaped the many biographers of the painter, was first

printed in a note to Foster's *Life of Goldsmith*, published in 1854. All these letters show the admiration in which Gainsborough held the actor; there could hardly be a more pleasant reflection of the homage of one great artist for another than appears in this too scanty correspondence. Garrick was at Bath when his portrait was painted, and was there again in 1766; but the letters of Jackson prove beyond doubt that the painter was often in London, and we may think of him with the greatest propriety as among the most enthusiastic of the audiences at Drury Lane on those occasions. The first letter is dated 1768, and contains an interesting reference to Gainsborough's contemplated contribution to imaginative painting, which, however, fortunately came to nothing:—

1768.

“DEAR SIR,—I take particular notice of your friendly anxiety for my recovery, and thank you most kindly for your sharp thought; but having had twelve ounces of blood taken immediately away, and perfectly recovered, strong in the back and able, so make your sublime self easy. I suppose your letter to Mr. Sharp was upon no other business, so have enclosed it; but observe, I thank you sincerely.

“Shakespeare shall come forthwith, as the lawyer says. Damn the original picture of him, with your leave, for I think a stupider face I never saw, except D——h's.

“I intend, with your approbation, my dear friend, to take the form from his pictures and statues, just enough to preserve his likeness past the doubt of all blockheads at first sight, and supply a soul from his works. It is impossible that such a mind and ray of heaven could stare with such a face and pair of eyes as that picture has. So, as I said before, damn that.

“I am going to dinner, and after I will try a sketch.

I shall leave the price to you ; I do not care whether I have a farthing, if you will let me do it. To be sure, I shall never ask more than my portrait price, which is sixty guineas, but perhaps ought to ask less, as there is no confinement of painting from life ; but I say I leave it to you, promising to be contented upon honour.

“ I could wish you to call upon any pretence any day after next Wednesday at the Duke of Montagu’s, because you would see the Duke and Duchess in my last manner, but not as if you thought anything of mine worth the trouble, only to see his Grace’s landscape of Rubens and the four Vandykes whole-length in his Grace’s dressing-room, etc. etc. etc.”

Gainsborough first painted the Duchess, in a bust, in 1765 ; the portraits he here modestly mentions are the two half-lengths of that lady and her husband, now at Dalkeith Palace.

“ BATH, *July* 1768.

“ DEAR SIR,—I as well as the rest of the world acknowledge your riches and know your princely spirit ; but all will not do, for, as I told you before, I am already overpaid for that shabby performance ; and if you have a mind to make me happier than all the presents London can afford, you must do it by never thinking yourself in my debt. I wished many years for the happiness of Mr. Garrick’s acquaintance, and pray, dear sir, let me now enjoy it quietly, for, sincerely and truly, I shall not be easy if you give way to any of your romantic whimsies. Besides, I thought you knew me too well, you who can read hearts and faces both at a view, and then at first sight too. Come, if you will not plague me any more upon this frightful subject, I will tell you a story about first sight. You must know, sir, that whilst I lived at Ipswich there was a benefit concert, in which a new song was to

be introduced, and I being steward went to the honest cabinetmaker who was our singer, instead of a better, and asked him whether he could sing at sight, for that I had a new song with all the parts wrote out. 'Yes, sir,' said he, 'I can.' Upon which I ordered Mr. Giardini of Ipswich to begin the symphony, and gave my signal for the attention of the company; but behold, a dead silence followed the symphony, instead of the song; upon which I jumped up to the fellow,—'Damn you, why don't you sing; did you not tell me you could sing at sight?' 'Yes, please your Honour, I did say I could sing at sight, but not at first sight.'—I am, sir, your most humble servant,

THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH.

"P.S.—I beg, sir, you will leave the affair of Gossett to me. I shall give him a bill payable at sight, I assure you."

*"Sunday Morning (1772)."*

"MY DEAR SIR,—When the streets are paved with brilliants, and the skies made of rainbows, I suppose you'll be contented and satisfied with red, blue, and yellow. It appears to me that Fashion, let it consist of false or true taste, will have its run like a runaway horse, for, when ears and eyes are thoroughly debauched by glare and noise, the returning to modest truth will seem very gloomy for a time; and I know you are cursedly puzzled how to make this retreat without putting out your lights and losing the advantage of all our new discoveries of transparent painting, etc. etc.,—how to satisfy your tawdry friends while you steal back into the mild evening gleam and quiet middle term.

"I'll tell you, my sprightly genius, how this is to be done. Maintain all your light, but spare the poor abused colours till the eye rests and recovers; keep up your music by supplying the place of noise by more





THE DUCHESS OF CUMBERLAND



sound, more harmony and more tune, and split that cursed fife and drum. Whatever so great a genius as Mr. Garrick may say or do to support our false taste, he must feel the truth of what I am now saying, that neither our plays, paintings, or music are any longer real works of invention, but the abuse of nature's lights and what has already been invented in former times.

"Adieu, my dear Friend. Any commands to Bath?

"T. G.

"A word to the wise. If you let your portrait hang up so high only to consult your room, it can never look without a hardness of countenance, and the painting flat. It was calculated for breast-high, and will never have its effect or likeness otherwise."

We see in these letters to Garrick further proof of Gainsborough's keen interest in the sister arts. He was never more happy, apparently, than in discussing even by letter the details of another man's profession, when that profession was concerned with music or acting. Just as thirds and fifths, harmony and modulation, were the mainspring of his correspondence with Jackson, so we see him here concerned with the details of stage management in a discussion with the foremost actor and manager of his times. Gainsborough was a bold man to advise a man like Garrick in his own business, and although we have no means of judging how it was received, yet his advice was certainly opportune. It was in this very year that the actor made one of his greatest mistakes. He seems to have grown nervous about his own powers to keep his audiences together, and had endeavoured to make up for the deficiencies which he most needlessly suspected in his own acting by a lavish increase in the ornamental setting of his productions, scenery, music, and the like. He had even debased the

boards of the old theatre by a fantastic production like the Chinese Festival, which, however, the audiences had very properly resented by a riot of the first dimensions.

Gainsborough's artist's eye saw the weak spot in these efforts at once, and this interesting letter is a record of his perception. No one will quarrel with his remarks on the taste of the time which Garrick was so weak as to try and follow instead of lead, as he ought to have done from his position and authority in his profession. Standards of criticism, indeed, in those days were lamentably low in most arts, including Gainsborough's own, which seems to give the more credit to those discerning spirits who were so quick to recognise and encourage his genius as a portrait painter. Garrick, despite his eminence as an actor, was among the worst judges of literature of his time. With the applause of the critics of his day, like Warburton he had "profaned the affecting catastrophe of 'Romeo and Juliet'"; had made a pantomime of the 'Midsummer Night's Dream'; had given "an elegant form to that monstrous composition, 'The Winter's Tale'"; and in this very year had obliged the town with his 'Hamlet with Alterations,' in which, as he claimed, he had 'rescued that noble play from all the rubbish of the fifth act.'

" 1772.

"MY DEAR SIR,—I never will consent that anybody makes a present of your face to Clutterbuck but myself, because I have always intended a copy by my own hand for him, that he may one day tell me what to do with my money, the only thing he understands except jeering of folks.

"I shall look upon it that you shall break in upon my line of happiness in this world if you mention it, and for the original it was to be my present to Mrs. Garrick; and so it shall be, in spite of your blood.



"Now for the chalk scratch—it is a poor affair, not much like the young ladies; but, however, if you do not remember what I said in my last and caution your brother off the same rock, may you sink in the midst of your glory.

"I know your great stomach, and that you hate to be crammed, but, by G—, you shall swallow this one bait, and when you speak of me do not let it be like a goose, but remember you are a fat turkey.

"God bless all your endeavours to delight the world, and may you sparkle to the last.

"D—n Underwood.

"THO. GAINSBOROUGH."

"BATH, *June 22, 1772.*

"DEAR SIR,—I ask pardon for having kept your picture so long from Mrs. Garrick. It has indeed been of great service in keeping me going; but my chief reasons for detaining it so long was the hopes of getting one copy like to hang in my own parlour, not as a show picture, but for my own enjoyment to look when I please at a great man who has thought me worthy of some little notice; but not one copy can I make which does not resemble Mr. Garrick's brother as much as himself: so I have bestowed a drop of excellent varnish to keep you out instead of a falling tear at parting, and have only to beg of dear Mrs. Garrick to hang it in the best light she can find out, and to continue puffing for me in the manner that Mr. — informs me she does.

"That you may long continue to delight and surprise the world with your original face, whilst I hobble after my copy, is the sincere wish, dear sir, of your most unaccountable and obedient servant,

"THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH.

"P.S.—The picture is to go to London by the Wiltshire fly-waggon on Wednesday next, and I believe will arrive by Saturday morning."

"BATH, 22nd August 1772.

"DEAR SIR,—I doubt I stand accused, if not accursed, all this time for my neglect in not going to Stratford and giving you a line thence, as I promised; but what can one do such weather as this—continual rainy. My genius is so damped with it that I can do nothing to please me. I have been several days rubbing in and rubbing out my design of Shakespeare, and hang me if I think I shall let it go, or let you see it at last. I was willing, like an ass as I am, to expose myself a little out of the simple portrait way, and showing where that inimitable poet had his ideas from, by an immediate ray darting down upon his eye turned up for the purpose; but, confound it, I can make nothing of my ideas, there has been such a fall of rain from the same quarter.

"You shall not see it, for I will cut it out before you can come.

"Tell me, dear sir, when you purpose coming to Bath, that I may be quick enough in my motions. Shakespeare's bust is a silly smiling thing, and I have not sense enough to make him more sensible in the picture; and so I tell ye, you shall not see it. I must make a plain picture of him standing erect, and give it an old look as if it had been painted at the time he lived, and there we shall fling 'em.

"I am, dear sir, your most obedient, humble servant,  
"THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH."

It will be seen from these letters that the ill-fated project of the idealised portrait of Shakespeare was in

agitation for four years at least, and that it evidently originated in a commission from Garrick himself. In contemplating the traditional portraits of the poet, Gainsborough, no doubt, met with the difficulty he had encountered in the alderman with the dimple in his chin. Most of us will sympathise with his estimate of those works of art—above all, in his description of the Stratford bust as “a silly smiling thing.” A journey to that town was evidently in contemplation, but did not take place; and we may suppose his impressions were gathered from a cast of that effigy, which surely is the single justification for the sages of the Baconian theory.

On the whole, it is perhaps as well that Gainsborough brought no completion to his attempt to add to the existing portraits of Shakespeare. His conception of the subject is clear enough: a standing figure of the poet, the eye turned up to heaven, a ray of light proceeding from above striking that eye, and conveying to the face in which it was to shine the inspiration which produced “Lear,” “Hamlet,” “Othello,” and “As You Like it.” Here surely were occasion for the enemy to blaspheme, and one cannot regret that the scheme ended, as is almost certainly the case, with a “wipe of the background brush.”

The letters to Garrick are supplemented by a couple which the painter wrote to John Henderson, the actor, then a young man at the very outset of his career, and in course of his long engagement with Palmer, during which he really learnt his art. It is hardly necessary to point out how plainly Gainsborough's great admiration for Garrick appears in these letters. Here, too, we see the painter in his enthusiasm giving an actor instruction in his own art—a proceeding he no doubt felt justified in by the youth of Henderson, who was twenty-six at the time.

"BATH, 27th June 1773.

"DEAR HENDERSON,—If you had not written to me as you did, I should have concluded you had been laid down; pray, my boy, take care of yourself this hot weather, and don't run about in London streets, fancying you are catching strokes of nature at the hazard of your constitution. It was my first school, and deeply read in petticoats I am, therefore you may allow me to caution you.

"Stick to Garrick as close as you can for your life; you should follow his heels like his shadow in sunshine. No one can be so near him as yourself when you please, and I'm sure, when he sees it strongly as other people do, he must be fond of such an ogre.

"You have nothing to do now except to stick to a few great ones of the earth, who seem to have offered you their assistance in bringing you to light, and to brush off all the low ones as fast as they light upon you. You see, I hazard the appearing a puppy in your eyes by pretending to advise you, from the real regard and sincere desire I have of seeing you a great and happy man.

"Garrick is the greatest living creature in every respect; he is worth studying in every action, every view, and every idea of his is worthy of being stored up for imitation, and I have ever found him a generous and sincere friend. Look upon him, Henderson, with your imitative eyes, for when he drops you'll have nothing but poor old Nature's book to look in. You'll be left to grope it out alone, scratching your pate in the dark or by a farthing candle. Now is your time, my lively fellow, and do ye hear, don't eat so devilishly; you'll get too fat when you rest playing, or get a sudden jogg by illness to bring you down again. Adieu, my dear H.—Believe me, yours, etc.

T. G."



"BATH, *July* 18, 1773.

"DEAR HENDERSON,—If one may judge by your last spirited epistle, you are in good keeping; no one eats with a more grateful countenance or swallows with more good-nature than yourself.

"If this does not seem sense, do but recollect how many hard-featured fellows there are in the world that frown in the midst of enjoyment, chew with unthankfulness, and seem to swallow with pain instead of pleasure. Now, any one who sees you eat pig and plumb sauce immediately feels that pleasure which a plump morsel smoothly gliding through a narrow glib passage into the regions of bliss, and moistened with the dews of imagination, naturally creates.

"Some iron-faced dogs you know seem to chew dry ingratitude and swallow discontent. Let such be kept to under parts, and never trusted to support a character. In all but eating, stick to Garrick; in that let him stick to you, for I'm curst if you are not his master. Never mind the fools who talk of imitation and copying. All is imitation, and if you quit that natural likeness to Garrick which your mother bestowed upon you, you'll be flung. Ask Garrick else.

"Why, sir, what makes the difference between man and man is real performance, and not genius or conception. There are a thousand Garricks, a thousand Giardinis and Fischers and Abels. Why only one Garrick with Garrick's eyes, voice, etc. etc. etc.? one Giardini with Giardini's fingers, etc.? one Fischer with Fischer's dexterity, quickness, etc.? or more than one Abel with Abel's feeling upon the instrument? All the rest of the world are mere hearers and seers. Now, as I said in my last, as Nature seems to have intended the same thing in you as in Garrick, no matter how short or how long, her kind intention must not be crossed. If it is,

she will tip the word to Madame Fortune, and you'll be kicked down stairs. Think on that, Master Ford. God bless you.

T. G."

Gainsborough's advice to Henderson as to making Garrick his model was no doubt sound enough, but it is to be feared that the young actor got little besides from that eminent actor. The painter must have made acquaintance with Henderson quite soon after the latter's arrival in Bath, where he made his first appearance in October of the previous year, 1772, playing Hamlet for Palmer at a guinea a week, and under a three years' agreement. "Gainsborough," says Fulcher "who was on intimate terms with the proprietor, and had free access to a box on all occasions, a courtesy which he repaid by the presentation of several beautiful pictures, was among the audience. So pleased was he with the abilities the young man displayed, that he invited him to his house, painted his portrait, and before the first season was over became the firm friend and patron of John Henderson."

At the time Gainsborough wrote these letters, Henderson was in London, trying to push his interest among the great powers of the stage. Garrick, curiously enough, had no great opinion of his ability, and advised him to stick to Bath, though from all accounts the advice was not altogether disinterested. Garrick, Foote, Harris, and Leake all heard Henderson rehearse; Colman refused to hear him, and Bath remained his only resource during these years. Here he had a great success in a variety of parts, Shakespearian and others, and his experience was so varied that the engagement with Palmer provided him with the best of all training.

When Henderson again turned to London, Cumberland interested himself in the young man and pressed his claims upon Garrick, but with no success. Garrick



THE PAINTER'S WIFE





was almost certainly jealous of Henderson; he was annoyed, moreover, as was said, by an imitation of himself given by Henderson in his own presence. Ireland says that he was asked by the great man to breakfast, and invited to give a specimen of his powers of imitation. After he had, much to the gratification of his host, given impersonations of the methods of his brother actors, Barry, Woodward, and Love, Garrick asked for an imitation of himself. Henderson declined, saying, with much tact, that "Mr. Garrick was beyond imitation." On being pressed however, he at last complied, and so exactly caught to the manner of the player, his voice and his action, that the company declared the mimicry perfect. Garrick, however, was not equally pleased; the performance was, no doubt, too perfect for him. "Egad," he said, "if that's my likeness, I have never known it."

Although it is recorded that Henderson had offended Colman by a similar imitation of himself, that manager gave Henderson his first opportunity of appearing in London when he took the Haymarket from Foote, in 1777. In June of that year the young man appeared with the greatest success as Shylock, and thereafter Henderson was continuously employed until his death, in 1785. Macklin, reckoned the best Shylock then alive, complimented Henderson on his performance in that part, and even Mr. Garrick refrained from hostile criticism, though when he went to see the performance, he professed to discover extraordinary merits in some of Henderson's fellow-players in the piece.

In public estimation, Henderson stood next to Garrick, and though Garrick continued to decry him, which was perhaps the best compliment he could pay, other good judges were more candid. "A fine actor," said Mrs. Siddons, "with no great personal advantages

indeed, but he was the very soul of intelligence. His delivery of soliloquy was unrivalled, and he had uncommon powers of mimicry." Rogers, too, described him as a "truly great actor, whose Hamlet and Falstaff were both equally good." Poor Henderson died untimely in 1785 at the age of thirty-eight, by a fever say some, by poison administered by mistake by his wife according to others.

Gainsborough painted him thrice. The portrait of the actor in the National Portrait Gallery is not among the most attractive of his works. Its warm colour dates it at the end of the Bath period, but this quality is owing partly to a merciless varnishing. The other and finer portrait is the property of the Garrick Club, and there is a third in private hands.

Angelo, in another of those interesting reminiscences of his few meetings with Gainsborough, declared that everybody at Bath except Gainsborough and Beau Nash were afraid of Quin, who was one of the painter's intimates during his residence in that city. Gainsborough there probably renewed an acquaintance which had begun in the studio of Frank Hayman, whose boon companion the actor was. Quin was very well known at Bath, where he had resided more or less regularly since 1748, and almost continuously since his retirement from the stage as a paid actor, three years later. It was from Bath that he wrote that letter to Rich, his manager, with whom he had quarrelled, and received the famous reply of the same laconic quality. By way of relenting a little from his hostile attitude he wrote to Rich, "I am at Bath. Yours, James Quin." "Stay there and be damned. Yours, John Rich," was the reply.

Angelo tells us that Gainsborough was much in the company of this eccentric companion during the later years of the actor's life. Quin would often visit the painting-room for a conversation with his friend. "When

just relieved from a fit of the gout," says Angelo, "he would crawl to the painting-room of Gainsborough, and, tapping at the door, would inquire, 'Is Old Grumpus at home?' 'Come in,' was the reply, when the painter, placing a chair for his gouty friend and a stool to rest his foot upon, he would put on a grave doctorial look, and, resting his chin upon his maulstick, inquire in the Bath medical phrase, *secundum artem*, 'Well, how is toe?'

"If a portrait happened to be upon the easel, as Quin said, he, Gainsborough, was in the humour for a congenial growl at the dispensation of all sublunary things. If, on the contrary, he was engaged in a landscape composition, then he was all gaiety, his imagination in the skies. Dependent, then, upon either of these circumstances, did these two strange men and boon companions shape and model the tenor of their discourse."

This is a confirmation of a curious tradition that the painter disliked the painting of portraits, and was happy only when engaged on landscape—a thing difficult to believe in the face of his genius as a painter of faces. It is repeated, however, by many of his contemporaries. Angelo continues: "Gainsborough, for all his apparent playfulness of style, often told Quin, who again assured my father of the fact, that nothing could equal the devilism of portrait painting. Indeed, he told me at his house in Pall Mall, that he was sure the perplexities of rendering something like a human resemblance from human blocks was a trial of patience that would have tempted holy St. Anthony to cut his own throat with his palette knife." Quin apparently was quite capable of distinguishing between the painter's successes and failures. "Sometimes, Tom Gainsborough," he used to say in his brusque manner, "a picture in your rigmarole style appears to my optics the veriest daub; then, the devil's in you, I think you a Vandyke."

Quin's interesting character is perhaps best presented in *Humphrey Clinker*, where Smollett took the unprecedented liberty of weaving the life of a living character into his story and under his proper name. The masterful Quin was nearing his end when he became intimate with the painter, and it is strange that a mutual esteem should have sprung up between the two men, instead of the enmity which would have been less surprising between characters so similar. Gainsborough was often at Prior Park, where he may have heard that famous encounter between the actor and Warburton. "That saucy priest," as Walpole calls him, was haranguing upon the beauties of the royal prerogative. "Spare me, my Lord," said Quin, "you are not acquainted with my principles. I am a republican, and perhaps I even think that the execution of Charles the First might have been justified."

"Ay," replied Warburton, "and by what laws?"

"By all the laws he had left them," said Quin.

The Bishop then shifted his ground, and bade Quin remember that all the regicides came by violent ends.

"I would not advise your Lordship to make use of that inference," rejoined Quin, "for if I am not mistaken, that was the case of the Twelve Apostles."

Among the Bath worthies with whom Gainsborough must have spent much of his leisure was John Wiltshire, the carrier. Men of that calling were personages of importance before the era of railways, and Wiltshire was an important member of his class. His family had already attained the rank of squires, and he himself lived in a mansion built by Wood at Shockerwick, a property acquired by his father between 1740 and 1750. The Wiltshires had been well-known residents in or near the city since the time of the first Thomas Wiltshire, who died in 1648. A Walter Wiltshire, Thomas's grandson, had much to do with the early entertainments



of the city, and was partner with Nash in some of his less reputable undertakings. His son founded the vast carrying business which was developed by Gainsborough's friend.

The relations of these two men show a very pleasant disposition in both, and go to confirm the tradition of the painter's abounding good-nature. Wiltshire's intercourse with Gainsborough seems to have been of the happiest. He professed so great an admiration for the painter's work that he would never take payment for conveying the finished canvases to his sitters, or of delivering the annual works to the exhibitions in London. "No, no," said he; "I admire your painting too much to take payment." Gainsborough refused to remain under this continuing and increasing obligation, when the carrier proposed a scheme of compromise which pleased both. "When you think," he said, "that I have carried to the value of a little painting, I beg you will let me have one, sir, and I shall be more than paid."

It was in these circumstances that the small but important collection of the painter's work was acquired by John Wiltshire which was known by his name, and was dispersed by his descendants at the Shockerwick sale in 1867. Cunningham tells a story of the good feeling between the two. Gainsborough begged the loan of one of Wiltshire's horses as the model for a figure he wished to place in one of his pictures. The good carrier saddled and bridled the animal and sent it to the painter as a present. "There was long extant," says Fulcher, "a remarkably fine study of this animal, when, after too old for work, it had returned to ease and clover." Gainsborough, not to be outdone in generosity, painted the "Harvest Wagon" and sent it to the carrier. In that canvas Wiltshire's own waggon appears drawn by his own horses, including that given by him to Gains-

borough. The driver pulls up the team in order that a peasant girl may join the others in the waggon ; this girl being painted from one of Gainsborough's own daughters, her sister being also represented as seated in the waggon. On presenting this canvas to the carrier, Gainsborough said it pleased him more than any piece he had ever executed. It is the picture now in the possession of Lord Tweedmouth, which was sold at the Shockerwick sale for £3097. That sale included also the portraits of Quin and Foote, the Parish Clerk now in the National Gallery, a Boy and Dog, and two landscapes. It is uncertain, of course, whether these pictures were all acquired by Wiltshire as a set-off for his services as a carrier ; but if so, Gainsborough certainly repaid his debt, and with interest.

Gainsborough's artistic acquaintance at Bath was perhaps completed by his intimacy with Abel, Bach, and Fischer, all three of whom were associated in that musical profession which has never failed to find lucrative patronage for foreigners in England. Karl Frederick Abel was a fellow-pupil of Johann Christian Bach at Leipsic under the latter's father, the great John Sebastian Bach. It was Abel who first fired Gainsborough's imagination with the beauties of the viol da gamba, and the estimation in which he held him is very plain in one of the letters to Jackson. Abel was perhaps the most eminent of the players of that instrument of which there is record. He came to London in 1759, and gave his first concert in the Great Room in Dean Street, Soho, all the pieces in the programme being of his own composition. The town was vastly pleased with his music, and he had his reward in the appointment as Queen Charlotte's chamber musician at two hundred a year.

When Johann Christian Bach came to London in 1765, Abel joined him, and they lived together and

jointly conducted Mrs. Cornely's subscription concerts at Carlisle House, later at the Hanover Square Rooms.

Abel's "musical science and taste were so complete," says Burney, "that he became the umpire in all musical controversy, and was consulted like an oracle. He was accustomed to call his viol da gamba the King of Instruments, and to say of himself, 'There is one Abel.'"

After Bach's death, in 1782, Abel continued the concerts with less success, and he went to Germany in the following year, and there fell upon that habit of drink which eventually killed him. His last appearance was in 1787 at Mrs. Billington's concert, and he died a month later, "after a lethargy of sleep of three days' duration."

Gainsborough's friend Bach was the eleventh son of the illustrious Sebastian, and a notable member of that remarkable dynasty of musicians who generation after generation sustained the family tradition of musical ability in their native Thuringen during two complete centuries. Until the time of the great Sebastian, in whom the genius of the family culminated, the Bachs through four generations had forgathered in the little towns of that country, Arnstadt, or Erfurt, or Eisenach; had met for social intercourse and the cultivation of the hereditary talent; often married sisters, and generally kept together in a clan which hoarded as it were the family ability, until it blazed forth in the person of Johann Sebastian.

Johann Christian, the painter's friend, was one of the succeeding generation which spread the reputation of his family about Europe, but in whose hands perhaps it began to decline. His father died when he was fourteen; at nineteen we read of him as organist at Milan Cathedral, and as writing opera, which perhaps brought him into contact with Signora Grassi, the prima donna of the opera-house in the southern city, whom he married

when he was twenty-three, and brought to England. His musical compositions for the pianoforte were much admired by ladies and amateurs, and did much to spread the popularity of that instrument. He was clever, intelligent, and genial, "but, in spite of easy circumstances, died much in debt."

The last of the trio of Gainsborough's musical friends was Johann Christian Fischer, the noted player of the hautboy, who had held the post of player of that instrument to no less a potentate than Frederick the Great. He first appeared in England at the Thatched House in June of 1768, and his playing was for many years a great attraction at the Bach and Abel concerts and at Vauxhall. As a member of the Queen's band, Fischer was frequently before the Court, and his playing of Handel's fourth oboe concerto at the Handel Commemoration in 1784 so delighted King George, that His Majesty pulled out his pencil and left a note of his admiration on the book of words. Fischer's tone must have been very powerful, for Giardini, the eminent fiddler, characterised it as "such an impudence of tone as no other instrument could contend with," which was a very human complaint from the professor of the more delicate instrument.

Fischer, though no chicken in point of years, seems to have been of a very personable address and aspect, as appears plainly enough from his portrait by Gainsborough in the Royal collection. At Bath he seems to have fascinated Mary Gainsborough, the painter's younger daughter, and there followed a *tendresse* on both sides, which duly ripened into marriage some years later in London, and which we shall have occasion to glance at on a later page. Here we note that poor Fischer died in 1800, after a seizure of paralysis while playing at a State concert.



The intimacy of the painter with these three men was, we think, intermittent only at Bath, where it must have been confined to the opportunities given by the visits of the musicians to the city, or of the journeys made by the painter to London. When, however, Gainsborough migrated to town, they were all among the closest of his friends, and there are many anecdotes of their relations which we shall refer to in the proper place.

Gainsborough included those two notable families at Bath, the Sheridans and the Linleys, among his acquaintance. We have seen already that he was painting the portrait of the beautiful Elizabeth Linley in 1768—that portrait, now at Knole, in which so much of her youthful beauty is preserved. Angelo mentions that he was introduced to the painter in the same year by Sheridan, then only seventeen, and about leaving Harrow in order to finish his education in London, where indeed he became a pupil of the elder Angelo. As an acquaintance of both parties, the painter must have been much interested in the romantic proceedings which ended in the alliance of the two families by the marriage of young Sheridan to Elizabeth Linley. Sheridan only joined his father in Bath in 1770, when his future wife was assisting her rather mercenary father with his concerts at Bath and Bristol, and occasionally further afield, at Oxford, Cambridge, and in London. The details of the courtship which followed are unequalled in modern times for their romantic flavour. There were the penniless but fascinating Sheridan on the one side, the pair of elderly suitors on the other, the girl devotedly in love with the youthful dramatist, and the parents of both opposed to their marriage. Out of these elements developed a story which would have made the fortune of a novel writer. The young lady, persecuted by the attentions of the elderly Matthews, appeals despairingly

to young Sheridan, which makes one wonder at the attitude of her father, old Linley, who rather favoured Matthews with his money-bags. Sheridan whips the young lady off to France, with the intention of placing her in a convent; old Linley follows the pair and brings the young lady back, though not before she had married her lover at Calais, a ceremony which they agreed to treat as a betrothal. On Sheridan's return, Matthews publishes his conviction that Sheridan is a liar and a scoundrel. Sheridan fights him in London, disarms him, and makes him beg for his life. A second duel follows in Bath, in which the younger man is badly wounded. On his recovery, and in the face of the opposition of both families, he is rewarded for his bravery and constancy by the hand of the lady; and by all the rules of the game should have lived happily with her ever afterwards.

There is perhaps no figure in all that picturesque eighteenth century which so appeals to our imagination as that of Elizabeth Linley, whether as maid or wife, that gracious personality whom all her contemporaries conspired to praise, until she seems to us the very quintessence of feminine beauty and charm. There is the pretty figure of the shy child offering tickets from her little basket at the door of the Bath assemblies; the beauteous girl with the God-given voice of the concerts and oratorios; the romantic figure of the love-story surrendering herself absolutely to the man of her choice; the gracious young married woman; the beautiful young matron, with her wistful remembrance of the happier days of her early married life; and finally the untimely death. The consensus of praise for Mrs. Sheridan's beauty is as extraordinary as the absence of anything but enthusiasm for the perfection of her character. All the critics of their fellows, from Horace





MRS. SHERIDAN AND MRS. TICKELL



Walpole downwards, exchanged their sneers for generous praise in writing of Mrs. Sheridan. The roué Wilkes thought her the "most modest, pleasing, and delicate flower" he had seen; "the elegance of Mrs. Sheridan's beauty is unequalled by any I ever saw except Mrs. Crewe," says Fanny Burney, which is perhaps more convincing still; the Bishop of Meath thought her the "connecting link between woman and angel."

Gainsborough himself has best preserved that beauty for the delight of succeeding generations. Reynolds indeed made Mrs. Sheridan the subject of one of his masterpieces, but we feel that the "St. Cecilia," superb as it is as a composition, presents less of the intimate beauty of the sitter than either of the three renderings of the same lady by Gainsborough. In all these appears that quality of gentle melancholy which constitutes one of the greatest charms of his finest work. The earliest, of course, is the picture of Elizabeth at the age of sixteen, painted with her brother Tom, which we have already mentioned, and now at Knole. The second was painted shortly after her marriage, and is the well-known canvas at Dulwich College, where she stands holding a guitar by the side of her sister, Mrs. Tickell, who is seated. We learn from a letter by that lady that the family were delighted with this picture, and thought that it did justice to Elizabeth's beauty, though Mrs. Tickell not unnaturally hints that she considered her own hardly used. The last and finest of all is the superb canvas now in the possession of Lord Rothschild, which Gainsborough exhibited in 1783 when Mrs. Sheridan was twenty-nine. In composition it is very like the picture of Mrs. Robinson in the Wallace collection, the attitude being almost identical, and the figure seated on a bank in an open landscape. It was engraved by Gainsborough Dupont in an atrocious plate, prints

from which are mercifully rare. It is probable indeed that the failure of the engraver to produce anything of the charm of the picture led to the suppression of the print, which would account for its scarcity. An impression, however, came to the British Museum in the magnificent bequest of Lord Cheylesmore, and any one interested in mezzotint engraving should compare a photograph of the picture with the engraving. It is a remarkable example of the failure of an able engraver in dealing with a subject which might have inspired the most incapable. The likeness is absolutely lost, and the blooming young woman of thirty appears as an elderly and unattractive matron, whose hair so finely treated in the picture appears in the print like the locks of Medusa. One of Gainsborough's finest landscape backgrounds, too, is transformed in the print into the poorest of conventions. Mr. Charles Wertheimer has a very beautiful head of an attractive young woman by Gainsborough, which may be a fourth portrait of Mrs. Sheridan. This portrait, however, has little of the melancholy of the other three.

We can well imagine the impulsive Gainsborough being fired by the beauty of the face and of the personality of Miss Linley, and his appreciative talent for fine music being touched by the sound of that marvellous voice at the Bath concerts. There is an interesting story related of him in this connection by Thicknesse.

"After returning from a concert at Bath nearly twenty years ago (that is, in 1768 or 1769), where we had been charmed by Miss Linley's voice, I went home to supper with my friend, who sent his servant for a bit of clay from the small-beer barrel with which he modelled, and then coloured her head, and that too in a quarter of an hour, in such a manner that I protest that it appeared to me even superior to his

paintings. The next day I took a friend or two to his house to see it, but it was not to be seen; the servant had thrown it down from the mantelpiece and broke it."

It is just possible that Thicknesse was misinformed as to the reason of the disappearance of this model, and that Gainsborough, bored by the Governor's officiousness in bringing his friends in the morning, had removed it as a means of getting rid of him. This is suggested by a note of Fulcher to this passage from Thicknesse, stating that C. R. Leslie had in his possession, some years before he (Fulcher) wrote, "an exquisite plaster cast of a head of Miss Linley from a clay model by Gainsborough, which unfortunately met with a similar fate." Fulcher adds, "Gainsborough would now and then model the faces of his friends in miniature, finding the material in the wax candles burning before him; the models were as perfect in their resemblance as his portraits."

The last of the few anecdotes recorded of Gainsborough at Bath is by Thicknesse, and is very creditable to both.

"A gentleman and a friend of mine had, without letting any one know his distress, shot himself in this city. I found by some letters from a female which came into my hands from the coroner, that he was connected with a woman in London, who had painted the distress of her mind in those letters *à la* Gainsborough. I wrote to her, and her reply to me was of the same cast, and, meeting Mr. Gainsborough going to the play when I had the letter in my hand, I showed it to him. I saw the stifled tear ready to burst from his eye, and so quitted him. He returned home, sent me a banknote in a letter, wherein he said, 'I could not go to the play till I had relieved my mind by sending you the enclosed banknote, which I beg you to transmit to

the poor woman by to-morrow's post.' His susceptible mind and his benevolent heart led him to many such repeated acts of generosity, though at that time I knew he was not rich, and I suppose did not die with a tenth part of what he might have been possessed of had he been a worldly-minded man."

Gainsborough's wife Margaret remains a very faint shadow throughout these years; she is hardly mentioned, indeed, except inferentially by the Governor, who is continually suggesting parsimony as one of her failings. It seems a grievance on the part of Thicknesse that she managed to put by £500 during the fourteen years' sojourn in Bath—a fact which, to some of us, and in view of the prodigal benevolence of her husband, appears evidence of virtue. Margaret, however, was now very much concerned for her daughters, who were already of marriageable years; and from the passage in one of the Jackson letters, in which Gainsborough deplores the "dusty business of looking for husbands," Mrs. Gainsborough was doubtless busy enough. We do not value the Governor's animadversions on the lady very highly; there was evidently a grievance of long standing between the pair, which, from a rather naïve admission of the excellent Thicknesse, may have originated in her boredom at his frequent calls for entertainment at the painter's house. As a counterblast to the Governor's innuendoes, we may perhaps quote Cunningham, himself quoting Mrs. Lane, one of Mrs. Gainsborough's nieces.

"His wife, whatever the Governor has insinuated to the contrary, was a remarkably mild and sweet-tempered woman—I repeat the words of Mrs. Lane—who gave her husband his own way, and never sought to win him to her way except by gentleness. Indeed, he was one of the last who would have brooked controul, and so proud



or so whimsical, that he never rode up to his door in a hackney coach, and admonished his niece to avoid doing so."

Almost the single anecdote preserved of the relations of Gainsborough with his wife is an incident which some have considered rather touching, but which has occasioned some derision with one of the painter's biographers.

"Whenever Gainsborough spoke crossly to his wife, a remarkably sweet-tempered woman, he would write a note of repentance, sign it with the name of his favourite dog Fox, and address it to his Margaret's pet spaniel Tristram. Fox would take the note in his mouth and duly deliver it to Tristram. Margaret would then answer, 'My own dear Fox, you are always loving and good, and I am a naughty little female ever to worry you as I often do, so we will kiss and say no more about it.'"

## CHAPTER VI

### WORK AT BATH—1767-1774

LITTLE is known of the details of Gainsborough's professional life at Bath beyond what may be gathered from the list of his known works painted in that city. Of these the chief index is contained in the catalogues of the exhibitions, of the Incorporated Society of Artists up to the year 1768, and those of the Royal Academy from 1769 to 1772, in which year he arrived at one of his periodical disagreements with that body, and refrained from contributing again until 1775, when he was finally settled in London. In addition to his contributions to the exhibitions, there remain a large number of unexhibited portraits which have been identified as of the Bath period, and the many landscapes and rural subjects which we have already mentioned as typical of his work in the western county.

These works, taken together, represent the labour of a very busy man, and we may think of Gainsborough at Bath as fully employed with sitters in his painting-room in the Circus, but as seizing any opportunity a cessation of such work offered of turning to the landscape and rustic subjects which he preferred. Little of his landscape work of this period bears much evidence of having been painted from nature. It occupies a position technically between the painful studies of the Suffolk days and the inspired abstractions of the landscape





THE MARKET CART



backgrounds in some of his later portraits. But tradition, the few works known to have been inspired by local scenery, as well as the longing for country life which appears so plainly in one of his letters to Jackson, all suggest that Gainsborough took every opportunity that presented itself of seeking inspiration in the open air. The "Market Cart," the "Harvest Waggon," the "Cottage Door," and a score of other similar works, were doubtless painted in the studio in the circumstances described by Fulcher. But, the increasing subjective quality which may be recognised in these works notwithstanding, it is impossible to doubt that the painter sought the materials from which they were evolved among the peasantry and the pleasant scenery of the country lying near Bath. We read of his having a friend at Corfe, near Taunton, for example, "where he used often to sketch," and the "Wood Scene" exhibited by Mr. A. E. White in 1885 was doubtless the result of one of his expeditions to that locality. Several of his portraits, too, like the Boy's Head sent to the first exhibition of the Academy, are known to have been painted in the country. The great collections of pictures at Wilton and elsewhere, which had so profound an influence on his art, would also employ much of Gainsborough's time which was unoccupied by sitters; there were the annual expeditions to London at the time of the exhibitions; and, altogether, Gainsborough was certainly less tied to his painting-room and to Bath than has been commonly supposed.

The list of his exhibited work, scanty and unsatisfactory as it is from its lack of the detail necessary for complete identification, introduces us to some fine work in portraiture and to some personages of interest.

To the exhibition of 1767 he sent three portraits—those of Lady Grosvenor, the Duke of Argyll, and a Mr. Vernon, as well as a "Landscape with Figures."

The Lady Grosvenor, now in the possession of the Duke of Westminster, is a half-length, and shows the lady in a velveteen dress with white net and pink ribbon. This lady three years later was the centre of one of the choicest scandals of the day—a scandal which set all the gossip-mongers from Horace Walpole downwards writing for their lives. “The Duke of Cumberland,” as Horace in his pleasant way puts it, “had the mishap of being surprised at least once with my Lady Grosvenor, who is actually discarded by her lord.” “Lord Grosvenor,” says the same authority, “had given her no slight grounds of alienation,” while the lady herself was one “whom a good person, moderate beauty, no understanding, and excessive vanity, had rendered too accessible to the Duke of Cumberland.” If we may trust another of those recording angels of the period, Sir Nathaniel Wraxall, which, however, is a large assumption, the damages of £10,000, which was a result of the trial which followed, were awarded to Lord Grosvenor, “in spite of the efforts of Lord Chief Justice Mansfield to save the King’s brother.” The Earl settled £1200 a year on the divorced lady, which we may hope was some slight consolation when the fickle Cumberland fluttered off to the widow Horton only two years later, and so helped to provide George the Third with an occasion for the Royal Marriage Act, by which the love affairs of his house have since been regulated.

There are various miniatures of the actors in this drama preserved in the memoirs and letters of the times. Horry saw the lady at Northumberland House “with such a display of frizz that it literally spread beyond her shoulders. I happened to say it looked as if her parents had stinted her in hair before her marriage, and that she was determined to indulge her fancy now,” a remark which brought Walpole into sad disgrace with the lady’s

mother, Lady Henrietta Vernon. The town was much amused over the story of the Duke's love-making as recounted at the trial. He used to meet Lady Grosvenor at obscure country inns, it seems, where the Duke was taken for an eccentric country squire, and was christened Fool by the rustics. Reynolds's biographers tell an amusing story of the Duke when he took his Duchess to be painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds in Leicester Fields: "When, after he had been some time blundering and swearing and stumbling over easels and stretchers, the Duchess insisted *sotto voce* that he should say something pleasant to the painter, the only remark he could muster up as he stared at the canvas on which his pretty wife's face was laid in, was, 'What, eh! so you always begin with the head, do you?'"

The portrait of the Duke of Argyll of the exhibition of 1767 is that of John Duke of Argyll, who succeeded his cousin as fourth duke in 1767, but had long been known as Colonel Campbell. Colonel Campbell was an able soldier, who had fought with the army in Flanders and at Dettingen, and later he filled many offices about the Court of George the Second and George the Third. He was the husband of that beautiful Mary Bellenden, "smiling Mary, soft and fair as down," Queen Caroline's maid of honour and the very type of lovable womanhood, according to all her contemporaries. One would have liked to see Gainsborough's impression of that lady, even in her mature years, beside those which he painted of her husband and her son. It was Mr. Gay who sang of Mary Bellenden in the style of Chevy Chase, and of her high spirits at that doleful Court, which is painted so depressingly by the cynical Hervey:

"Bellenden we needs must praise,  
Who as downstairs she jumps,  
Sings over the hills and far away,  
Despising doleful dumps."

It was Mary Bellenden, too, who would stand no nonsense from the interesting Frederick Prince of Wales, but stood steadfast for her lover in spite of that great personage's attentions, and, as some say, slapped his face. "She was never afterwards mentioned by her contemporaries," says Walpole, "but as the most perfect creature they had ever known."

Gainsborough painted the Duke a second time, in the portrait at Inveraray, showing him seated and holding the baton of his hereditary office of Steward of the Scottish Household. It was engraved by James Wilson, and is included in Messrs. Graves's small series.

The other portrait of this exhibition was of Mr. George Vernon, son of the first lord, whom he succeeded as second Baron Vernon. The "landskip" has not been identified.

Gainsborough's contribution to the Society's exhibition of 1768 was a pair of whole-length portraits, described in the catalogue as "An Officer" and "A Sea Officer." The "Officer" was Captain Needham, the ancestor of the Earl of Kilmorey, who at present owns the canvas.

The "Sea Officer" was the Honourable Augustus John Hervey, later third Earl of Bristol, a very notable member of that family, which was described by a witty lady of the period as a distinct species of the genus *homo*. "Mankind," said this lady, "consists of men, women, and Herveys." The Captain is represented leaning upon a rock upon a sea-shore, holding a telescope, with a ship of war in the middle distance, and is a remarkably fine picture, which owes perhaps something to the Keppel painted by Reynolds some fifteen years earlier.

Hervey was one of the two gentlemen who stood in the relation of husband at one and the same time to



the fascinating lady who began life as Miss Chudleigh, a local beauty of Plymouth, and whose career was so interesting to the scandal-mongers of two generations in the middle years of the eighteenth century. The charms of this young lady when she became maid of honour to the Princess of Wales were the despair of the young men about town, and her dress, or rather the want of it, at the masquerades the scandal of the dowagers. The first victim seems to have been the young Duke of Hamilton, who exchanged secret vows with the lady, but deferred his marriage until after his return from the grand tour. Then Captain Hervey appeared, succeeded in captivating the volatile beauty, and married her out of hand, but secretly, at Lainston Church. The lady, still as Miss Chudleigh, returned to Court, and Hervey, quite naturally, grew jealous of the attentions which other young men paid to the maid of honour. He threatened to declare the marriage, upon which the spirited lady removed the leaf recording the match from the Lainston Register. Then, upon Hervey becoming Earl of Bristol, she bribed the parish clerk to restore it, attracted no doubt by her title of Countess. The Earl, however, grew weary of his wife, who seems to have shared the boredom, and the parties agreed to a separation. Then a former lover, Mr. Pierrepont, now Duke of Kingston, appeared, was captivated by the beauty, and conducted her as Miss Chudleigh still, although she was the mother of a son, with all decorum to the altar. Lord Bristol, with the eccentricity of his family, strolled into the church at the ceremony, to take, as he said, "a last look at his widow." The later history of this astonishing lady is well known. When the Duke died, in 1773, his heirs-at-law discovered the marriage with Hervey, and the Duchess was tried for bigamy before her peers in Westminster Hall, when old Tyger Thurlow

ordered her to be branded on the hand as a bigamist, and this ceremony having been performed with a cold iron, she disappeared on the Continent.

The exhibition of 1768 was the last of those organised by the Incorporated Society of Artists. That body had performed a most useful office to British art, by providing a means by which painters might be brought into direct relationship with the public who supported them. The exhibitions, too, had an educational influence upon that public itself, and did much, by popularising the work of such men as Gainsborough and Reynolds, to establish the claims of the painters of Great Britain to a school of its own, and to explode the pretensions of the debased Italian art, which before the exhibitions had alone engaged the attention of British amateurs. So much must always be reckoned to the credit of the Incorporated Society. But the time had arrived for that body to give place to another, which for good or evil had British art almost entirely in its keeping until well within living memory. From 1769 onwards we must look for Gainsborough's exhibited work among the catalogues of the exhibitions of the Royal Academy.

Gainsborough's relations with the Academy were on the whole so peculiar, and in some particulars so difficult to explain, that a glance at the origin of that body and of the circumstances in which it came into being seems desirable. His attitude towards the Academy appears to have been one of ill-concealed hostility from the beginning, and it is just possible that this attitude may be explained by the fact that the older institution, in which his great friend Joshua Kirby was much interested, was extinguished by the success of the new.

It is well known that the Academy owed its birth to the dissension among the members of the Incorporated Society, which had displayed itself chiefly at the meetings

of the members who were concerned with the annual exhibitions. The Incorporated Society had itself been the outcome of disagreement among the exhibiting artists of an earlier period. When the exhibition of 1761 was opened at Spring Gardens, there remained a discontented remainder, composed chiefly of the younger men, who continued sending their works to the Great Room of the Society of Arts in the Strand until 1764, after which they took the title of the Free Society of Artists, and continued their exhibitions at various rooms until 1775, when they expired at St. Albans Street. The stronger body at Spring Gardens, with whom Gainsborough regularly exhibited after 1761, became more and more prosperous and attracted increasing notice, until, in 1765, they were incorporated under Royal Charter with the title of the Society of Artists of Great Britain, and took arms: "Upon a field azure, a brush, a chisel, and a pair of compasses composed fretty, or; over them in chief, a regal crown proper." They had Britannia as a supporter on one side, and Concord on the other, and a crest composed of oak leaves, palm branches, and laurels. The list of the twenty-four directors of the Incorporated Society included all the rank and file of the artists of 1765, but few of their leaders. Lambert, the scene painter, was President; Francis Hayman, Vice-President; Dalton, Treasurer; and Francis Milner Newton, the Secretary. Richard Wilson was perhaps the most eminent of the painters; architecture was adequately represented by Chambers, and engraving by Macardell; but although Gainsborough and Reynolds both availed themselves of the annual exhibitions, neither was a recognised member.

By 1768, or indeed earlier, the Society was already a house divided against itself. It was rent with cabal and intrigue, and the more notable members were already

withdrawing from its meetings. The matter of dispute was one of administration or procedure, namely, whether the directors should be elected annually, or continue in office indefinitely. The majority, mainly insignificant men in their profession, had revolted against the directors, and had taken the management of the Society into their own hands. They had succeeded in ejecting sixteen of the twenty-four directors from office in 1768, and the remaining eight resigned on the 10th of November of that year. These gentlemen, who included Chambers, Hayman, Paul Sanby, Wilson, Wilton, Moser, and others, thereupon decided to form an institution of their own in opposition to the Incorporated Society, and to obtain the King's consent to act as their patron. The President of the Incorporated Society after the secession was Joshua Kirby, Gainsborough's old Ipswich friend.

Reynolds was absent in Paris when the new scheme was matured, and William Chambers, West, Cotes, and Moser were the active spirits in the movement. Chambers waited on the King in person towards the end of November, to explain the design of the proposed institution and to present the memorial praying for His Majesty's patronage. He found the King altogether propitious, and the matter was well forward when Reynolds returned from Paris. Chambers had submitted a list of proposed members to the King, who had himself nominated the officers or some of them, with Reynolds himself as President. A meeting was called at Wilton's, the sculptor, for the 9th December, to arrange these matters in order that Chambers might report the settlement of the business to His Majesty at an audience which had been granted to him for the following day at the palace.

In these circumstances, with Reynolds already nominated by the King as the President of the new



body, it was very important to obtain that painter's co-operation, and Penny and Moser called on him on the morning of the 9th December in order to secure his attendance at the meeting of the artists which was to be held in the evening. Reynolds apparently declined to associate himself with the enterprise. West then went to him and told him of the arrangements which had been made, that the King himself had approved the names of thirty out of the forty proposed members of the new body, and that these artists were all to meet at Wilton's studio in the evening to confirm the arrangement. Reynolds was still doubtful and averse to move in the matter. His reasons for this attitude, as he informed West, were that Joshua Kirby, who was not only the President of the Incorporated Society, but also Teacher of Perspective to the King, had assured him in the most decided manner that there was no truth in the rumour that such a design as was in contemplation had His Majesty's support, and that he thought it would be derogatory on his part to attend a meeting of artists who had no sanction for doing what they had undertaken. To this West replied :

"As you have been told by Mr. Kirby that there is no intention of the kind, and by me that there is, and that even the rules are framed and the officers condescended upon, yourself to be President, I must insist on your going with me to the meeting, where you will be satisfied which of us deserves to be credited in this business."

Reynolds knew West to be *persona grata* with the King, and was at last convinced, and consented to accompany him to the meeting in the evening. "In the evening at the usual hour," says Leslie, "West went to take tea with Reynolds before going to the meeting; but, either from design or accident, tea was not served till

an hour later than usual—not, indeed, till the time fixed for the artists to assemble at Wilton's; so that, when they arrived there, the meeting was on the point of breaking up, conceiving that, as neither Reynolds nor West had come, something extraordinary had happened. But on their appearing a burst of satisfaction manifested the anxiety that had been felt, and without any further delay the company proceeded to carry into effect the wishes of the King." A report of the proceedings was made to the King on the next morning, and the Academy thus constituted held its first general meeting four days later, on the 14th December 1768.

Gainsborough's name does not appear in the first list of the Academy published in the catalogue of the first exhibition, though the letters R.A. are appended to his name as an exhibitor. "It is evident," says Tom Taylor, "that there was a determination to secure him for the Academy, and that he let himself be secured; but he seems never to have taken any part whatever in the work of the Academy, and his membership is hardly traceable in the Academy records except by a quarrel occasionally about the hanging of his pictures."

Gainsborough was a man of capricious temper, and one who had little respect for the established thing. He had a manifest enjoyment in opposing the prejudices of others with his own, had little sympathy with pretensions of rank or social position which were generally accepted in that day, and was less careful of the feelings of his patrons than any artist of whom there is record, in modern times at least. Yet, after taking these peculiarities into full account, it is difficult to understand his attitude towards the Academy. To such an independent spirit the mere organisation of artistic matters and the creation of rules may have been distasteful, and his distaste would certainly not be diminished by the

elevation of the prim Reynolds to the Presidency—a man who, apart from all considerations of professional rivalry, was of a temperament opposed to Gainsborough's own as one pole to the other. And yet the Academy and its organised exhibitions were as useful to Gainsborough as to any artist living. It was no bad thing for a painter even of Gainsborough's ability to have men like Horace Walpole waiting yearly for his work, and chattering about it all over the town, and among the very class of people to whom the painter naturally looked for patronage. These exhibitions in London first enabled the painter at Bath to measure himself with Reynolds in London, and to confirm in the metropolis the fame which was already so secure in the western city. Neither was he ever diffident in availing himself of the advantages the Academy offered by its exhibitions. Of these, indeed, he made the fullest use when he did not feel himself offended by some fancied slight of the hanging committees, and he maintained on its walls a brisk rivalry with the President, not only in the number but in the subjects of their portraits. And yet he had nothing but contempt and rudeness for the Academy as a body; and one wonders whether these feelings were not inspired by his honourable loyalty to his old friend Kirby, who took the success of the new body so much to heart.

Kirby's chagrin was pitiful. We have seen how he endeavoured to dissuade Reynolds from identifying himself with the new institution—a statement for which Benjamin West is our authority, and of which there can be no reasonable doubt. But poor Kirby was to receive still further disappointment. There is an amusing story connected with West and the King which records his discomfiture. West, as is well known, was highly regarded at Court. He had a reputation for piety and a well-ordered life, which was very acceptable to King George,

and had been taken by the hand by the dignified clergy. Drummond, the Archbishop, had commissioned him to paint a subject from Tacitus, and had endeavoured to raise a subscription of £3000 in order that the young painter from Pennsylvania might be able to devote his genius to the painting of history, undisturbed by considerations of butchers and bakers. The subscription failed, but His Grace mentioned the young painter to His Majesty. The painter took his picture to the palace by command; the King was highly pleased, and decided to have one for himself. His Majesty then sent for Her Majesty, and, obligingly construing a passage from Livy for the benefit of the Queen and the painter, gave the young man a commission to paint on the spot *Regulus* as described by the historian.

When that picture was finished, and Mr. West brought it to the palace, Joshua Kirby, the King's Teacher of Perspective, was in attendance. He heard and echoed the King's praises of it, complimented the young painter, and expressed his hope that His Majesty would graciously allow his subjects to see the picture at the exhibition. "Certainly, certainly," said the King. "The exhibition of the Incorporated Society of Artists," added Kirby. "No, no, no," explained His Majesty; "the exhibition of my own Academy." Kirby was thunderstruck, and is said never to have got over the mortification. He died soon after, blighted, it was whispered, by this dreadful withdrawal of the Royal countenance from the Society.

Joshua Kirby was the lifelong friend of Gainsborough, whom the painter held in such esteem that he desired to be buried by his side in Kew churchyard. One likes to think his peculiar relations with the Academy were, to some extent at least, the result of his loyalty to this friend, who believed himself to have suffered so much by its success.





QUEEN CHARLOTTE



Gainsborough's contribution to the first exhibition of the Academy in 1769 consisted of four pictures—three portraits and a "landskip." The "Portrait of a Lady" of the catalogue has been identified as that of Isabella, Lady Molyneux, daughter of the second Earl of Harrington, and wife of the Lord Molyneux who was elevated to the earldom of Sefton two years later.

The "Portrait of a Gentleman" of the catalogue of 1769 is that of Mr. George Pitt, afterwards Lord Rivers, one of the minor diplomatists and politicians of his time, colonel of Militia, and member successively for Shaftesbury and the county of Dorset. Gainsborough painted Mr. Pitt on his return from Turin, at which Court he held the appointment of Envoy Extraordinary, and he appears in the uniform of that office in the picture.

As a young man Pitt was very handsome, and was a great favourite with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. His wife was fortunate enough to win the approbation of Horace Walpole, who writes of her as "all loveliness within and without." Lord Rivers himself was less fortunate. His memory is embalmed in Horry's pages as "that venerable Corydon, brutal and half mad."

The "Boy's Head" has been identified with great probability as the picture now or lately in the possession of Mr. F. W. Newton of Barton Grange, Taunton. Gainsborough was more than once in that neighbourhood on painting expeditions; and this picture, according to Mr. F. G. Stephens, was the result of a visit he made there in 1766 or the following year. Upon that visit he employed a village boy in odd jobs about his painting-room. Entering the studio one day quietly, he found the youth engaged with his pencils, and trying to copy some object in oils upon a shutter. "His attitude and absorbed expression caught the painter's fancy, and crying 'Stay as you are,' he seized a canvas and rapidly immor-

talised his young assistant." The boy has a palette and brushes in his hand, and is looking upward. The "landskip" of this exhibition has not been identified.

In 1770 Gainsborough sent six canvases and a book of drawings. The "Portrait of a Gentleman" was one of the Garrick portraits—either that engraved by Collyer, or that at one time in the Blaine collection; the landskip with figures probably the "Return from Harvest," an earlier version of the famous picture given to Wiltshire, and now in the possession of Lord Tweedmouth. The other canvases have not been identified.

The exhibition of 1771 saw five full-length portraits by Gainsborough. There is here a welcome break in the unfortunate lack of knowledge to enable one to identify Gainsborough's sitter with the entries in the Academy catalogue.

The first of these portraits is the group of Lady Sussex and her daughter, Lady Barbara Yelverton. The elder lady, who was the daughter of Colonel Hall of Mansfield, Woodham, Northampton, is seated under a tree, with her head resting upon her right hand; a prim little girl, with the typical sloping shoulders of Gainsborough's children, stands at her knee. The lady has her hair in powder surmounted with the cap of the period, and with strings under her chin. The daughter, a demure-looking child of perhaps nine years of age, developed later a surprising precocity, when at the age of fifteen she eloped with a neighbour, Mr. E. Thorold Gould, whom she married and by whom she left a son, who succeeded to her own barony of Grey de Ruthyn.

Two other full-length portraits were those of Lord and Lady Ligonier—the lady in a fancy dress, the gentleman with his charger. Viscount Ligonier, the second of the title, and kinsman of the veteran painted



by Reynolds, whose portrait is in the National Gallery, married Penelope, daughter of the first Lord Rivers. Before succeeding to the peerage, he had served as aide-de-camp to the Duke of Brunswick, but was more notable as a man about town than as a soldier. The town was much amused by a duel he fought in 1771 in Hyde Park with the poet Alfieri—that poet who was later the devoted lover of the Young Pretender's wife, the Countess of Albany, by whose side he lies buried in the church of Santa Croce, in Florence.

Lord Ligonier was one of the most intimate friends of Kitty Fisher, that lady whose position was so well defined and understood in those days. His Lordship is one of the heroes of the following anecdote, which is a convincing illustration of the manners of the times. It is taken from the *European Magazine* of 1793:—

“Mr. Pitt being one day at a review in Hyde Park with the King, some of the courtiers, seeing the celebrated Kitty Fisher at a distance, whispered His Majesty that it would be a good joke to introduce Mr. Pitt to her. The King fell in with it, and soon afterwards, looking towards Miss Fisher, purposely asked who she was. ‘Oh, sir,’ said Lord Ligonier, ‘the Duchess of N——, a foreign lady that the Secretary should know.’ ‘Well, well,’ said the King, ‘introduce him.’ Lord Ligonier instantly brought Mr. Pitt up and opened the introduction by announcing, ‘This is Mr. Secretary Pitt; this is Miss Kitty Fisher.’ Mr. Pitt instantly saw the joke, and, without being the least embarrassed, politely went up to her and told her how sorry he was he had not the honour of knowing her when he was a young man; ‘for then, Madam,’ said he, ‘I should have had the hope of succeeding in your affections; but, old and infirm, as you now see me, I have no other way of avoiding the force of such beauty but by flying from it,’

and then instantly hobbled off. 'So you soon despatched him, Kitty,' said some of the courtiers, coming up to her. 'Not I, indeed,' says she; 'he went off of his own accord, to my very great regret, for I have never had such handsome things said to me by the youngest man I ever was acquainted with.'"

The Mr. Nuthall whose full-length portrait was in this exhibition was a friend of the younger Pitt, who met with an extraordinarily tragic end. Four years after his picture was painted, he encountered a highwayman on Hounslow Heath, who robbed him. He continued his journey to his house unhurt, but died quite suddenly while writing a letter the same evening. It was believed that the shock of his encounter with the thief affected his heart.

The fifth of the 1771 portraits, another full-length, was that of Captain Wade, the Master of the Ceremonies at Bath, a gentleman upon whom the mantle of the great Nash may be supposed to have descended. This picture, long lost, has been discovered in the present year (1903) at Bath, and was sold at Christie's for £2100 in July.

Gainsborough exhibited in 1772 no less than fourteen works—four portraits and ten landscapes. None of the pictures have been identified, but the landscapes, we are told, were "drawings in imitation of oil painting."

A passage in Harry Angelo's memoirs seems to have interest in this connection, describing, as it does, some of the methods Gainsborough employed in producing the water-colour drawings, which, when duly varnished and framed, were the landscapes mentioned in the Academy catalogue for this year. The present writer has never encountered these drawings, but, according to Sir Walter Armstrong, they turn up occasionally at sales, when they excite dispute. "They are draw-

ings," says Sir Walter, "in water-colour, very free in handling, and bold in effect, painted on stout coarse paper laid down upon canvas, and varnished. . . . Varnished Gainsborough drawings of a less important kind are quite common. In some cases, perhaps, they have been varnished by irresponsible hands; but the painter seems to have had an unaccountable fancy for the process, and in most instances the blame should rest with himself. Anything more unpleasant than a varnished drawing it is hard to conceive." There are two or three unimportant specimens of these productions at the British Museum.

It will be seen that this description of the existing drawings agrees very closely with Angelo's account of their origin:—

"It is now time, however, to say something of Gainsborough's moppings, as, not long after the period of which I am writing, these his graphic vagaries were in high fashion.

"Never could a spot have been pitched upon for the experiment to be played off more successfully than at Bath, where Gainsborough resided during the fashionable season for many years. I saw him at his easel there, dashing out his designs, so long since as the year 1768.

"Had a man of less celebrity than he attempted such a method for sketching landscape even there, it might have failed; but he had established his renown by a slight and imposing style of painting, which, however difficult, excepting in the hands of a genius like himself, yet seemed to be effected without an effort of art.

"Gainsborough had in his experiments exhausted all the legitimate methods and all the tricks of painting in his oil pictures. He had established a reputation for a style of drawing as desultory in its way, when, not

acknowledging bounds to his freaks, instead of using crayons, brushes, or chalks, he adopted for his painting tools his fingers and bits of sponge. His fingers, however, not proving sufficiently eligible, one evening whilst his family and friends were taking coffee, and his drawing thus proceeding, he seized the sugar tongs, and found them so obviously designed by the genii of art for the express purpose, that sugar tongs at Bath were soon raised two hundred per cent.

“He had all the kitchen saucers in requisition; these were filled with warm and cold tints, and, dipping the sponges in these, he mopped away on cartridge paper, thus preparing the masses, or general contours and effects, and, drying them by the fire (for he was as impatient as a spoiled child waiting for a new toy), he touched them into character with black, red, and white chalks.

“Some of these moppings and grubblings and hatchings, wherein he took unusual pains, are such emanations of genius and picturesque feeling as no other artist ever conceived, and certainly such as no one has ever surpassed.”

It was in 1773 that Gainsborough arrived at his first open misunderstanding with the Academy, with the result that none of his pictures appeared at the exhibitions until 1778. What the difference was we know not. Walpole has a note in his catalogue to the effect that both Gainsborough and Dance had disagreed with Sir Joshua, and refused to send their work to the exhibition as a consequence. There is no official record of the disagreement in the Academy minutes; indeed, in the following year, 1774, Gainsborough was elected a member of the Council—upon his arrival in London, no doubt. He was even proposed for the Presidentship, and received a single vote. This is probably an echo of Nathaniel Hone's malevolence towards Reynolds.



That painter had an unreasoning jealousy of the greater man, which he had shown by a disgraceful exhibition of his own work, in which he had hinted very plainly at improper relations between Reynolds and Angelica Kaufmann. He was called sharply to account by the Academy; but it is quite in accord with what we know of his nature, that he should use Gainsborough, who was known to be at issue with Reynolds, as a stalking horse to annoy Sir Joshua by proposing him as President.

In 1775 the Council seems to have taken notice of Gainsborough's hostile attitude, when a motion was carried to omit his name from the list on the score of non-attendance and non-acceptance of office. A general meeting of the Academy, however, later restored his name.

The portrait painters of the eighteenth century were rapid workers, and, when in full practice like Gainsborough, were accustomed to turn out an amazing quantity of work. Reynolds, for example, left behind him some fifteen hundred completed canvases, a number which represents a finished portrait or subject painting for every week of his working life after he had established himself in London. It is known, however, that Sir Joshua owed much to the help of assistants and drapery men, and that in a majority, perhaps, of his portraits little except the heads came actually from his own hand. Gainsborough, on the contrary, enlisted very little aid in that way. His nephew Dupont assisted him to some extent during the later years of his life, but the majority of his pictures are painted by himself throughout, and bear the impress of his hand in every part.

Landscape, we know, engaged much of his interest, and consumed much of his working time, whenever any relaxation in the press of sitters waiting for their portraits enabled him to devote himself to the branch of his art

he loved best. But the portraits he sent to the various exhibitions which we have considered represented no more than a small portion of his work in portraiture while at Bath. There remain a number of portraits as well as landscape which, though undated, can be ranged approximately by their style; others which the dates of the sitters' lives place in their proper order; others again, no doubt, which have still to be recognised as his work.

In 1769 or 1770 Gainsborough painted the great Earl of Chesterfield. Another portrait of Lord Chesterfield, a whole-length, was exhibited in the Royal Academy in 1778 as a "Portrait of a Nobleman." Chesterfield was a noted figure at Bath in his later years, and was the reputed author of those amusing lines occasioned by the spectacle of Beau Nash's portrait between the busts of Newton and Pope in the pump-room :

"This picture plac'd the busts between,  
Gives Satyr all his strength :  
Wisdom and Wit are little seen,  
But Folly at full length."

It would be superfluous to say much about that extraordinary personality here—the capable statesman, the sponsor of the new style of measuring time in this country, the accomplished man of letters, and the chief jester at White's. There is, however, an anecdote of the Earl in the latter capacity which is less often quoted than some others. Chesterfield had a prodigious reputation as a wit in the choice company which met at that notable club during the later years of the reign of King George the Second. He led the laughter at that assembly, indeed, for a quarter of a century, and one reads of him in Walpole as "pronouncing witticisms among the lads of quality at White's." His vogue continued merrily until a new humourist arose in the person of young Mr. George Selwyn, who was himself a professed



GIOVANNA BACCELLI





wit. As there is never room for more than one jester at a club, Selwyn got rid of his senior by calling him Joe Miller, and by declaring that he spent the morning in preparing the jokes which he fired off at White's in the afternoon. Lord Chesterfield was so annoyed that he retired in dudgeon from the club forthwith.

It was well understood that Chesterfield was in little favour at Court, though the reason of this was not common property until many years after his death. Lord Chesterfield lost favour with Queen Caroline by a piece of sheer ill luck. He had played one Twelfth-Night at Court, as the custom was in the days of George the Second, and had won heavily at hazard. Afraid of going home with a large sum about his person, he took it to the apartments of the Mrs. Howard who had lodgings within the palace precincts of St. James's. That lady's position was thoroughly understood, and even recognised, by Queen Caroline herself; but Her Majesty happened to see Chesterfield trip up Mrs. Howard's staircase from a private window, and chose to be mightily offended.

With the King Chesterfield came into collision in the very year His Majesty succeeded his father, George the First. The Earl had married Lady Walsingham, a daughter of the Duchess of Kendal, the King's mistress, who was known to be mentioned favourably in His Majesty's will. This will the masterful George the Second snatched from under the nose of the astonished Archbishop, who was about to read it, and burned with his own royal hand. The incident was the basis of a heavy claim by Chesterfield on behalf of his wife against His Majesty. It is said that he threatened legal proceedings, if such were possible; but it is certain that there was a compromise, by which he received a large sum as hush money.

Gainsborough, while at Bath, painted a portrait of a lady who was a very picturesque figure of those times—

one of those ladies of great beauty and adventurous lives who seem to have been a social product in some ways peculiar to the eighteenth century. This was Grace Dalrymple, the girl of seventeen who married Dr. John Elliot, a notable Scottish physician old enough to be her father. The romance of her life began, perhaps, when a few years later she eloped with the Lord Valentia of that day, who took her to Paris, where he seems to have transferred her to Lord Cholmondeley, with whom she returned to England. In London she was one of the many ladies who attracted the notice of the Prince of Wales. A daughter of hers afterwards became the wife of Lord Charles Bentinck, son of the third Duke of Portland. She was known in London as "Dolly the Tall," and eventually drifted to Paris, where between 1783 and the convulsion of the Revolution she was an intimate friend of Philippe Egalité. She left memoirs of her life, which, considering her experience, are distinctly disappointing.

Gainsborough painted this lady twice—once in the full-length engraved by Dean, the other the bust in the collection of the Duke of Portland. The full-length is the earlier of the two; but the smaller picture at Welbeck is much the finer, and was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1885, and suggests a later development of the painter's art than that we are considering.

The portraits of the Duke and Duchess of Montagu have an interest as those which the painter recommended Garrick to see, as an example of his latest style, in the letter written to Jackson which we have already set out. The Duchess was a granddaughter of John Churchill, the first Duke of Marlborough, and daughter of the second Duke of Montagu. Upon the death of that nobleman the dukedom was revived in the person of her husband, George Brudenell, Earl of Cardigan. The Duchess was

apparently one of the most charming women of her day, and is mentioned by Walpole, who knew her well, in one of those passages which sometimes make us forget his frequent ill-nature. Writing to Conway in 1748 of this lady, then Lady Cardigan, he says: "whom I grow every day more in love with—you may imagine, not her person, which is far from improving lately; but since I have been here (Strawberry Hill) I have lived much with them, and, as George Montagu says, in all my practice I never met a better understanding nor more really estimable qualities, such a dignity in her way of thinking, so little idea of anything mean or ridiculous, and such proper contempt for both." The Duchess's first portrait, an oval, now at Montagu House, was painted in the early Bath period; the half-length at Dalkeith Palace at the end, where is also the portrait of her husband.

Another portrait of the Bath period is that of Alexander Fordyce, the failure of whose financial house (Neal, Jones, Downs & Fordyce) on Black Monday of 10th June 1772 brought ruin to thousands of people of means whose property was invested with that firm. In the first panic it was thought that most of the other private banks of that day would come down in the crash, and the calamity was only averted by the Bank of England, which stepped in and propped up some of the shakiest concerns. The disaster paralysed trade for a time, and even stopped public amusements. Many of the players had invested their savings in the bonds of the house, and were only relieved by the benefit performances which their more prosperous fellows charitably arranged.

Fordyce was bred a hosier in Aberdeen, but had married well and attained great eminence in the financial world. His wife was the daughter of the fifth Earl of

Balcarres, Lady Margaret Lindsay, sister of the better-known Lady Ann, the authoress of "Auld Robin Gray," which was indeed founded upon the love-story of Lady Margaret and Sir J. Bland Burgess, whom she married after Fordyce's death. This lady was painted by Gainsborough before her marriage, in a blue dress, with her arms crossed, and standing in a landscape—a picture still in the possession of Lord Crawford and Balcarres.

Fulcher perpetuates a rumour that the poet Chatterton sat to Gainsborough, and that "the portrait of the marvellous boy with his long flowing hair and childlike face is a masterpiece." "Considerations of date, age, and locality, to name only these," says Sir Walter Armstrong, "make it unlikely that Gainsborough painted Chatterton." Chatterton was born, as we know, in 1752, and met with his untimely death in 1770 at the age of eighteen. Bath being so near to Bristol seems to get over the difficulty of locality, and as Chatterton remained in his native city until the year of his death, age and dates seem to present little obstacle to a possible meeting with Gainsborough. The following letter from *Notes and Queries* seems worth quoting in this connection, if only to record a starting-point for further investigations.

"GAINSBOROUGH'S PORTRAIT OF THE POET  
CHATTERTON.<sup>1</sup>

"It will interest many to know that this picture has been recently found. The canvas is 25 by 30 inches, and it was found in an old carved wood frame of the period. The picture is much darkened by age. I will now describe it.

<sup>1</sup> *N. and Q.*, vi. s. 5. 367.



"Having carefully gone through such of Chatterton's biographies as are in the Reference Library at Manchester, I am in a position to say that the portrait fully describes the marvellous boy, both physically and physiognomically, as portrayed by those who knew him. The stiff neck shows astonishing pride, bordering on conceit; the mouth is full, sweet, womanly, and seems ready to smile; the eyes, very large, dark, and full, follow you everywhere. The slender right hand is laid on a pile of red-covered books. No doubt it is a Gainsborough. The burning of all Chatterton's papers accounts for the loss of the record. It will give me great pleasure to render any further information both as to the picture and where it is to be seen.

JASPER C. LAUD.

"WEST VIEW,  
"NORTHENDEN, NR. MANCHESTER."

A portrait of the Rev. Richard Graves, which was engraved by Gainsborough Dupont, is another of the Bath pictures, if indeed it is in oils and in existence. The doubt is suggested by the fact that the print bears the inscription, "Gainsborough *delt.*," which seems to point to a drawing. Graves was rector of Claverton, near Bath, and a notable man in his way, the author of *The Spiritual Quixote*, in which he held up Dissenters to derision, and a friend of Mr. William Shenstone, the poet, of Halesowen.

Gainsborough must often have met Graves at Prior Park, where the latter was a privileged guest, and was allowed to dine in his boots, in view of the distance to the Claverton parsonage. He was reputed a man of great absence of mind, and the guests at Prior Park watched him more than once leave the dining-room with his napkin on his spurs.

Among his minor works were verses addressed to

"Mr. Gainsborough, equally excellent in landskips and portrait."

"O'er seas or alps let other artists roam,  
In quest of beauties which you found at home ;  
Such charms our British nymphs alone can boast,  
And he who paints them truest, charms us most."

It was the fashion of the famous portrait painters to try their pencil occasionally on a man of colour: thus Reynolds, among others of the class, painted the very effective portrait of Omiah, the Otaheitan. Gainsborough produced such a work in his portrait of Ignatius Sancho, a personage who excited some interest in those days as that rare curiosity, a negro man of letters. Ignatius kept a chandler's shop at No. 20 Charles Street, Westminster, where he had a small circle of admirers. He was born on a slaver in the year 1729, had been befriended by the Duke of Montagu, who had made him his butler, and left him a legacy and an annuity, when Sancho took the shop in Westminster. In his leisure hours, as we are told by Mr. John Thomas Smith, he indulged his taste for the polite arts, music, painting, and literature, which procured him the countenance and acquaintance of several persons of distinction. He left some poetical effusions and a tract upon the theory of music, and his letters and life were published upon his death for the benefit of his family, by Joseph Jekyll, the witty Whig lawyer, and henchman of Lord Shelburne. Sancho's former connection with the Duke of Montagu probably led to his sitting to Gainsborough, and the portrait is undoubtedly of the middle Bath period.

An undertaking, strange for a man of Gainsborough's ability and independence, was that which he carried out at the request of the Society of Arts, in copying a portrait by Hudson of its first President, Jacob, Viscount Folkestone. He received his full fee of a hundred guineas for the paint-

ing, and a note of thanks telling him that the Society were "highly satisfied with his masterly performance."

Of the same period is the head of the fourth Duke of Bedford, now in the National Portrait Gallery—a portrait in which some saw a likeness to Mrs. Gainsborough when it was exhibited with that lady's in 1885. Then there is the head of Lord Frederick Campbell, the son of the Duke and Duchess of Argyll, whom we have already noticed. Lord Frederick was among the notable of the minor politicians of his time, and attached himself to the interest of the laborious George Grenville. He married Mary, the widow of the notorious Earl Ferrers, who in a frenzy of rage murdered his land steward, and, after trial by his peers at Westminster, suffered ignominiously at Tyburn, but from his own chariot and in a halter of silk.

At Bath, too, Gainsborough painted Mrs. Catherine Macaulay, the historian of England, a lady whose works with their republican cast created so much interest during their appearance between the years 1763 and 1771. Dr. Wilson, the son of the Bishop of Sodor and Man, was so enthusiastic at the good lady's views, that he presented her with a house and a library at Bath, and set up her statue in his church of St. Stephens, Walbrook, much to the scandal of his parishioners. Gainsborough must have painted this lady during the height of her fame, and while enjoying the Doctor's munificence as a resident of the city. Wilson quite changed his attitude, however, when Mrs. Macaulay, upon the death of her husband, married young Mr. Graham, a brother of the quack doctor, and many years her junior. Dr. Wilson was so shocked that he removed her statue from his church.

There are many stories of Mrs. Macaulay. She had the doubtful advantage of the admiration of the great Mr. Wilkes, whose views coincided somewhat with her own; but the most interesting of the anecdotes relate

to her encounters with Dr. Johnson. "You are to remember, Madam, that there is a monarchy in heaven," said the Doctor. "If I thought so, sir," replied the lady, "I should never wish to go there." Johnson, however, had the better of the next passage of arms. Dining one day at her house, he put on a grave face and remarked, "Madam, I am now become a convert to your way of thinking. I am convinced that all mankind are upon an equal footing. To give you an unquestionable proof, Madam, that I am in earnest, here is a very sensible, civil, well-behaved fellow-citizen—your footman; I desire that he may be allowed to sit down and dine with us."

One of Gainsborough's notable patrons at Bath was the second Viscount Bateman, and near the end of his stay in that city the painter made a visit to Shobdon Court, in Hertfordshire, where Lord Bateman lived. From that visit probably dates the portrait of that nobleman, still in the possession of the family. Here also, it is said, Gainsborough painted the "Going to Market," one of his fine rural subjects, also in the possession of the present lord. Among the same group of works may be reckoned the portrait of Miss Tyler of Shobdon, perhaps painted at the same time. This lady was an aunt of Robert Southey, who thus describes her:

"The walls of her drawing-room were covered with a plain green paper, the floor with a Turkey carpet. There hung her own portrait by Gainsborough, with a curtain to preserve the frame from flies and the colour from the sun. She was remarkably beautiful, so far as any face can be called beautiful in which the indications of a violent temper are strongly marked."

To conclude a list of the Bath portraiture, so far as it is known, we may perhaps mention a portrait of Lady Carr (now in America), one of the Duke of Cumberland, and one of the Duchess of Grafton,





COLONEL ST. LEGER



belonging to Sir W. Agnew, which are ascribed to the period by Sir W. Armstrong. Then there is the portrait of his friend Pearce, the Bath doctor, presented to him on his marriage by the painter. The rather formal group of Mr. and Mrs. Dehany, which Mrs. Bell reproduces in her volume, is obviously of the same epoch. Mrs. Bell also mentions certain portraits of relations, now in the possession of the Rev. E. Gardiner, as dating from the same years. These are of the painter's nephew, Edward Gardiner; the painter with his wife, a canvas exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1885; and one of Mrs. Dupont, often attributed to her son, but which Mr. Frith, R.A., who saw it at Folkestone, ascribes without any doubt to Gainsborough. We may add the portrait of the painter in the possession of the Royal Academy, presented to that body by his daughter after his death, as undoubtedly painted at Bath.

The group of dogs at the National Gallery belongs to this period—a little canvas, which may be matched with the very interesting study of a hen and chickens which Mrs. Bell reproduces in her volume, said to have been painted in a single sitting.

Of the canvases of landscape and rural subjects which Gainsborough produced in such numbers during the middle period of his life, the most typical specimens, perhaps, are the large "Watering Place" at the National Gallery, and the Duke of Westminster's "Cottage Door." Of these famous works it seems superfluous to make more than a bare mention. The one represents the painter's fullest development in pure landscape; the other, perhaps, is the most perfect specimen of his ideal treatment of a homely subject. Technically, no doubt, he advanced from both, but there are none of his works of the kind which display the real Gainsborough to more advantage, or in which his exquisite sense of beauty

and his feeling for the spirit of his subject are better preserved.

Governor Thicknesse, in his character of Chorus, prepares us for a second flitting of the Gainsborough ménage—this time from Bath to London. It is characteristic of that self-important personality that he claims to have been the impelling power which took Gainsborough and his household gods to London in 1774, just as he contended that it was his advice which led the painter to Bath fourteen years earlier. He makes a long yarn of the events which led to the second pilgrimage, and the narrative is again perhaps best rendered in his own words, which do not lack an unconscious humour. According to the Governor's account, it was a misunderstanding between the painter and himself which drove the former to London, that misunderstanding arising out of Gainsborough's taste for the *viol da gamba*, and for a particular instrument belonging to Mrs. Thicknesse, the third lady to bear the Governor's honoured name.

"I cannot help relating a very singular and extraordinary circumstance," begins Thicknesse, "which arose between him, Mrs. Thicknesse, and myself; for though it was very painful for me to reflect on, it turned out fortunately for him, and thereby lessened my concern, as he certainly had never gone from Bath to London had not this untoward circumstance arose between us; and it is no less singular that I, who had taken so much pains to remove him from Ipswich to Bath, should be the cause, twenty years afterwards, in driving him from thence.

"I believe I may venture to say that all great genius's are a little allied to a kind of innocent madness, and there certainly was only a very thin membrane which kept this wonderful man within the pale of reason. He had asked me, when he first went to Bath, to give



him the portrait of a little Spanish girl painted upon copper, with a guitar in her hand and one feather in her hair—a picture now in his house in Pall Mall, the study of which, he has often told me, made him a portrait painter; and as he afterwards painted Mrs. Thicknesse's full-length before she was my wife, he rolled it up in a landscape of the same size and of his own pencil, and sent it to me to London by waggon. I was much surprised, at the first opening of it, to see the head of a large oak tree instead of Mrs. Thicknesse's head, but I soon found between the two pictures a note as follows: 'Lest Mrs. Thicknesse's picture should have been damaged in the carriage to town, this landscape is put in as a case to protect it, and I now return you many thanks for having procured me the favour of her sitting to me for it; it has done me service, and I know it will give you pleasure.'

"During our residence at Bath he had often desired me to sit to him for a companion to it, which I as often declined, not because I should not have felt myself and my person too highly flattered, but because I owed Mr. Gainsborough so much regard, esteem, and friendship, that I could not bear he should toil for nothing, knowing how hard he worked for profit. However, during the last year of his residence at Bath, he fell in love with Mrs. Thicknesse's *viol di gamba*, and often, when he drop'd in to my house and took it up, offered me a hundred guineas for it.

"At that time I had reason to believe *I might not find it inconvenient* ever to remove from my own house in the Crescent, and, observing to Mrs. Thicknesse how much he admired her viol, that he had some very good ones of his own, and that she might at any time have the use of either, she consented to give him an instrument made in the year 1612, of exquisite workmanship

and mellifluous tone, and which was certainly worth a hundred guineas.<sup>1</sup>

"We then asked him and his family to supper with us, after which, Mrs. Thicknesse, putting the instrument before him, desired he would play one of his best lessons upon it: this, I say, was *after supper*, for till poor Gainsborough had got a little borrowed courage (such was his natural modesty) he could neither play *nor sing*.

"He then played, and charmingly too, one of his dear friend Abel's lessons, and Mrs. Thicknesse told him he deserved the instrument for his reward, and desired his acceptance of it, but said, 'At your leisure, give me my husband's picture to hang by the side of my own.'

"A hundred full-length pictures bespoke could not have given my grateful and generous friend half the pleasure—a pleasure in which I participated highly, because I knew with what delight he would *fagg* through the day's work to rest his cunning fingers at night over Abel's compositions, and an instrument he so highly valued.

"Gainsborough was so transported with this present that he said, 'Keep me hungry—keep me hungry, and do not send the instrument until I have finished the picture.'

"The viol da gamba, however, was sent next morning, and the same day he stretched a canvas, called upon me to attend, and he soon finished the head, rubbed in the dead colouring of the full-length, painted my Newfoundland dog at my feet, and then put it by, and no more said of it or done to it.

"After some considerable time had passed, Mrs. Thicknesse and I called one day at his house. Mr. Gainsborough invited her up into his picture-room,

<sup>1</sup> "After the death of my daughter it was sold to Mr. Brodrep for forty guineas."

saying, 'Madam, I have something to show you.' Now the reader will naturally conclude, as she did, that it was some further progress upon my picture, which, as it was last left, had something the appearance, for want of light and shade in the drapery, of a drowned man ready to burst, or rather of a ragged body which had been blown about upon a gibbet on Hounslow Heath, for the dog's head and his master's were the only parts that betrayed the pencil of so great a master. But, upon Mrs. Thicknesse's entering the room, she found it was to show her Mr. Fischer's portrait painted at full-length, completely finished, in scarlet and gold like a colonel of the Foot Guards, and mine standing in its tatter and ragg condition by the side of it.

"Mrs. Thicknesse knew that this was a picture *not to be paid for*, and that it was begun and completed after mine. She would have rejoiced to have seen a hundred pictures finished before mine that were to be paid for, but she instantly burst into tears, retired, and wrote Mr. Gainsborough a note desiring him to put my picture up in his garret, and not to let it stand to be a foil to Mr. Fischer's; he did so instantly, and as instantly sent home the viol da gamba.

"Upon my meeting Mr. Gainsborough, I believe the next day, I asked him how he could have acted so very imprudently, and observed to him that it was not consistent with his usual delicacy or good sense; that even if he had made a foolish bargain with her, yet it was a bargain, and ought to be fulfilled, for I must own that, had he been a man I loved less, I should have been a little offended.

"Now reason and good sense had returned to my friend. 'I own,' said he, 'I was very wrong not only in doing what I did, but I have been guilty also of a shameful indelicacy in accepting the instrument which

Mrs. Thicknesse's fingers from a child had been accustomed to; but my admiration of it shut out my judgment, and I had long since determined to send it her back with the picture; and so I told Mr. Palmer.' And so he did, adding, 'Pray make my peace with Mrs. Thicknesse, and tell her I will finish your picture in my very best manner.'

"In a few days after, we three met, and they two shook hands and seemed as good friends as ever; but days, weeks, and months passed, and, no picture appearing either at his house or mine, I began to think it then my turn to be a little angry too; for I suspected, and I suspected right, that he had determined never to touch it more, and I wrote him a letter and told him so, adding that Mrs. Thicknesse was certainly entitled to the picture, either from his justice or his generosity; that I would not give a farthing for it as a mark of his justice, but if he would send it to me from his generosity, unfinished as it was, I should feel myself obliged to him; *and he sent it me as it was.*

"Nothing but knowing the goodness of his heart, and the generosity of his temper, and the peculiarities of his mind, could ever have made me even speak to him again, after having given me so deadly a blow, for it was a *deadly one*; but I knew, though it seemed his act, it did not originate with him; he had been told that I had said openly in the public coffee-house at Bath, that when I first knew him at Ipswich his children were running about the streets without shoes and stockings; but the Rascal who told him so was the Villain who robbed the poor from the plate he held at the church door for alms! That Mr. Gainsborough did not believe me capable of telling so gross a falsehood, I have his authority to pronounce, for he told me what he said in return.

" 'I acknowledge,' said he, 'I owe many obligations



to Mr. Thicknesse, and I know not any man from whom I could receive acts of friendship with more pleasure,' and then made this just remark: 'I suppose,' said he, 'the Doctor knew I now and then made you a present of a drawing, and he meanly thought that by setting us at variance he might come in for one himself.'

"The first time I met Mr. Gainsborough after he had presented me with my own unfinished picture, I saw that concern and shame in his face which good sense and an upright heart and conscious errors always discover. I did not lament the loss of his finishing strokes to my portrait, but I grieved that it had ever been begun. He desired I would not let any other painter touch it, and I solemnly assured him that it should never be touched; it had, I said, been touched enough, and so had I, and then the subject dropped. But, every time I went into the room where the scarecrow hung, it gave me so painful a sensation that I protest it often turned me sick, and in one of those sick fits I desired Mrs. Thicknesse would return the picture to Mr. Gainsborough, and that, as she had set her heart upon having my full-length portrait, I would rather give Mr. Pine his fifty guineas for painting it, than be so daily reminded and sicken'd at the sight of such a glaring mark of disregard from a man I so much admired and so affectionately esteemed. This she consented to do, provided I would permit her to send with it a card expressing her sentiments at the same time, to which, I am sorry to say, I too hastily consented.

"In that card she bid him take his brush and first rub out the countenance of the truest and warmest friend he ever had, and so done, then blot him for ever from his memory. Upon the receipt of that note he went directly to London, took a house in Pall Mall at three hundred a year rent, returned to Bath to pack up his goods and

pictures, and sent me a note : ' God bless you and yours ; I am going to London in three days.' "

Thus the Governor, who, from his own point of view, gives a very clear account of the reasons for the flight from Bath. Cunningham, however, quoting an unnamed lady who pretended to direct information from Mrs. Gainsborough, gives a different version of the relations between Gainsborough and the Thicknesse which led to the rupture. " The painter (according to this account) put a hundred guineas privately into the hands of Mrs. Thicknesse for the *viol da gamba* ; her husband, who might not be aware of what passed, renewed his wish for his portrait, and obtained what he conceived to be a promise that it should be painted. This double benefaction, however, was certainly more than Gainsborough had contemplated ; he commenced the portrait, but there it stopped, and after a time, resenting some injurious expressions from the lips of the Governor, the artist sent him the picture, rough and unfinished as it was, and returned also the *viol da gamba*."

If Cunningham be right, the two men were both victims of a piece of double dealing on the part of Mrs. Thicknesse, which, though not unknown in feminine interference in business matters, one hesitates to accept. That hesitation throws much of the odium upon Mrs. Gainsborough for reporting such a story, assuming of course that Cunningham's informant gave a reliable account of what that lady had said. In any case, it seems that Thicknesse is to be saddled with just as much blame as he imputes to himself in his own account of the rupture, and no more. His story is obviously honest, and if the hundred pounds passed to Mrs. Thicknesse he certainly knew nothing of it : that payment may be reckoned as some excuse for Gainsborough's brusqueness, but it was no reproach to the Governor.



GEORGE PRINCE OF WALES





But, knowing the character of the two men as we do, nothing seems more likely than Thicknesse's account of the misunderstanding. Gainsborough was obviously bored by the patronising airs and restless fussiness of the Governor, and, above all, found it difficult to paint his portrait. As we know, he had already failed to complete the "decoy duck," and no doubt he found something in the Governor's effigy which was repugnant to his artistic personality. He was also the most intractable of men, and one of the worst ever born to hurry or control in any way. Here in fact was again the Gainsborough of the "Damn your dimple and chin, I will paint neither one nor the other," exasperated by the importunity of the Governor in urging him upon a task which he found distasteful. Gainsborough was not careful in offending greater people than the Governor. The man who had flouted duchesses inquiring for their portraits was unlikely to show any great urbanity when the Governor and his lady kept jogging his memory about the full-length of that tiresome gentleman.

On the whole, however, we conceive Thicknesse to have been much ill-treated in the matter. At the best, Gainsborough had some little excuse for his rudeness in the payment of the hundred pounds to the lady, though it seems inconceivable that he should have concealed that payment from Thicknesse throughout the proceedings; at the worst, he was guilty of something very like bad faith in keeping the *viol da gamba* without any visible intention of completing the picture. It was certainly no palliation of his ill taste, that when pressed at last to complete his part of the bargain he should return the instrument to the lady and send her the unfinished portrait in derision, and after engaging her husband to allow no other hand to touch it.

Finally, it is to be counted to the credit of the

Governor that his version of the matter was never contradicted. It appeared in the very year of Gainsborough's death, when the eminence and fame of the painter were in every one's mouth, and a whole nation was deploring the loss of his genius at a relatively early age. Mrs. Gainsborough lived at the house in Pall Mall for seven years after her husband's death, and the fact that neither she nor other of his representatives ever made any attempt to traverse the Governor's story adds much to its intrinsic probability.

We are unable to follow the Governor only when he comes to estimate the effects of his misunderstanding with the painter. That masterful personality was quite unlikely to have been driven to change all his plans in life by a silly quarrel with such an original as Thicknesse, who differed at one time or another with all his acquaintance. He may, however, have seized the occasion for the maturing of plans which had been formed long before. There were many good reasons why Gainsborough should be turning his eyes towards London, personal as well as professional. He had by this time worked pretty thoroughly whatever mine of wealth Bath presented to a portrait painter, and was in a position to estimate with reasonable accuracy its probabilities of a future yield. Bath by 1774 had passed its zenith, and its vogue as the watering place of England was beginning to be shared by rivals like Harrogate and Cheltenham. One reads, too, among the letters of the period, accounts of the first movements of people of fashion towards the seacoast, which were presently to rob the western city of its vogue altogether.

Again, the development of the annual exhibitions of painting in London and the establishment of the Royal Academy must have drawn Gainsborough's attention to the possibilities of practice in London. He knew already

the phenomenal success which had attended Reynolds in London, and had already measured his own work against that of the President of the Academy without any cause for misgiving.

Lastly, his daughters were more than husband-high in 1774, and, so far as Gainsborough knew, had failed to find suitors in Bath, the soft passages between Mary and the fascinating hautboy player Fischer which had taken place having been concealed from his gaze. It is clear, from one of the Jackson letters, that the requirements of the spinsters were often in his mind, and a change of scene could not but be of great advantage to their prospects as giving their attractions a wider field of action. We know that Gainsborough was in Bath as late as March of 1774, but in the summer of that year the faithful Wiltshire was employed in a final effort for his friend; and Gainsborough, taking with him his wife and daughters and his nephew Dupont, together with a large number of unsold landscape paintings, made the last migration of his life.

The Governor adds one or two remarks about the final scene at Bath, which show his fussy good-nature, as also his unfortunate prejudice against Mrs. Gainsborough. It was the well-intentioned if tiresome Thicknesse whom we know from other reports than his own, who bethought himself, quite unnecessarily, of the risks he imagined his friend to be running in making a little considered move to London, and did what he could to obviate that risk.

"Well knowing my man," continues Thicknesse, "and having a recent proof of his being sometimes capable of acting very injudiciously, I was much alarmed lest, with all his merit and genius, he might be in London a long time before he was properly known to that class of people who alone could essentially serve him, for, of all the men I ever knew, he possessed least of all that

worldly knowledge to enable him to make his own way into the notice of the great world. I therefore wrote to Lord Bateman, who knew him and who admired his talents, stating the above particulars, and urging him at the same time for both our sakes to give him countenance and make him known, that being all that was necessary. His Lordship for me, or both our sakes, did so, and his remove from Bath to London proved as good a move as it was from Ipswich to Bath. It was not one or two ill-judged actions among a thousand good and generous ones I knew him to be *guilty of* which could break off our friendship, nor did he *background-brush* my countenance, as Mrs. Thicknesse had desired, for some years afterwards I asked whether he had so done. 'No, no,' said he, *colouring*, for he was a good colourist, 'one day or other, some of your family or friends will be glad of it.'

Thicknesse finishes with a fling at poor Margaret, which he presents in all the impressiveness of italics:

"But I now suspect that it (the portrait of himself) has had the brush or the scissors, a fate many of his portraits have met with in the course of forty years. Jealousy or hatred has occasioned many such murderous deeds."



## CHAPTER VII

### LONDON—1774

NO man's life was divided into epochs more equal or better defined than that of Thomas Gainsborough. There were the fourteen years of his boyhood at Sudbury, the sixteen devoted to his student days in London and to the early period at Ipswich, in which he acquired the habit of work and received those first impressions from nature which were afterwards to bear such increase; he was just fourteen years at Bath; and we have now to follow him through other fourteen years in London, ended by his death in 1788, in which he completed his title to fame.

The house Gainsborough chose for his residence on coming to London may still be recognised on the south side of Pall Mall, Nos. 81 and 82, now a part of the War Office. It was known in Gainsborough's times and later as Schomberg House, after the third Duke of that name, a henchman of Dutch William, who built it at the end of the seventeenth century. The house preserves many interesting traditions, both of owners and tenants. Lord Holderness acquired it on the death of the Duke of Schomberg, and in 1760 let it to the Duke of Cumberland, the hero of Culloden and the 'forty-five. Upon the Duke's death, in 1765, it passed into the hands of Gainsborough's landlord, John Astley, who paid five thousand pounds for it, and spent another

five thousand in alterations. This same Astley is an interesting figure in the minor artistic annals of his times. He was a fellow-pupil of Reynolds with old Thomas Hudson, the portrait painter, and was with Joshua during the student days in Rome. The gossiping writers of the day repeat a humorous story of Astley in those times—a thriftless out-at-elbows fellow, by all accounts. There was a picnic at Tivoli, at which John made one, and, unguardedly taking off his coat, he displayed the back of his waistcoat made out of one of his canvases bearing a very natural representation of a waterfall.

On his return from Rome, Astley set up as a portrait painter, and seems to have had a certain vogue in Dublin, where he startled the damsels by using his sword as a maulstick. From Dublin he started to paint his way through England to London, and appears to have assumed the airs of a beau and ladykiller of the first water. He sustained the part, indeed, with some success, for at the Knutsford assembly he fell in with Lady Duckenfield Daniel, a rich widow, gained that lady's affection, married her straight-away, and, by her ladyship's unfortunate death a year or two later, the rogue stepped into five thousand a year and an estate in Cheshire. He would appear to have renewed his acquaintance with Reynolds, however, before those fortunate events, for the careful painter's notebooks record some small loans to John: "Mr. Astley, debtor, £7, 7s.; ditto at cards at Mr. Wilkes's; ditto at my house,"—£12, 15s. 6d. in all; and it may be hoped that John paid up faithfully when the widow died.

Astley divided the great house into three, and lived himself in the centre portion, which he adorned "most whimsically," says Pennant. Gainsborough was lodged in the western wing, still standing and marked with a memorial plaque to that effect; and it was his home from 1774 until his death. He had Astley himself for a

neighbour until 1780, when that gentleman let his part of the house to Dr. Graham, the quack doctor and impostor, who fills a place in the memoirs of the next few years as a purveyor of a curious amusement for the quality of the West End. Graham had a wonderful entertainment, which included demonstrations of "the secret of perpetual youth and beauty," mud baths, and the Celestial Bed, a piece of furniture which held forth great attractions for those wanting heirs. He was assisted by a young woman of great personal attractions, and for a crown one might see the doctor and this lady sitting in separate mud baths up to their necks, the lady's hair being wondrously dressed in the mode, with powder flowers and ropes of pearls, and the doctor's wig a marvel of the perruquier's skill. Another day, the humbug would lecture on youth and beauty, his theories being illustrated by the blooming creature in the flesh as the Goddess of Health. In the demonstration of the Celestial Bed, according to the doctor's advertisements, "the Rosy Goddess of Health assisted at the celestial matters, and that sacred vital fire over which she watches." The descriptive exhibition of the apparatus in the daytime was "conducted by the junior officiating priest," and curious antiquaries have identified this gentleman as a young man who in due time became Dr. Mitford, the father of the authoress.

There has been much controversy as to the identity of the lady, which, in view of a theory advanced by Sir Walter Armstrong that she was the original of the "Musidora" in the National Gallery, has much interest for us. Some say that Dr. Graham's ménage was an early phase of the life of the peerless Emma Lyon, before she entered on that curious career which included so many surprising experiences. Students of those times are familiar with the details of that career—the acquaintance

with Charles Greville; his handing of the lady over to his uncle, Sir W. Hamilton, who ought to have known better; her antics as Lady Hamilton at Naples; her infatuation of the mighty Nelson, and her fascination of poor Mr. Romney. Romney's latest biographers, by the way, declare that the painter's connection with that "divine woman," as he called her, was purely platonic. We know how often he painted her—nearly fifty times in all, it is said—very convincingly, to be sure, in some of his canvases, but much less so in those numerous others which turn up regularly at Christie's as horrible purple phantoms.

Others who have undertaken to defend what is left of the lady's very battered reputation, contend with vehemence that Emma was never with Dr. Graham at all, and that the Rosy Goddess of Health was another lady altogether, by the name of Mrs. Prescott. Our interest in the matter is quickened by a theory of Sir Walter Armstrong, who thinks Gainsborough, like most artists of the time, was attracted by Emma's beauty, and painted her in the well-known "Musidora" in the National Collection. If Emma really was next door, nothing is more likely. Everybody painted her who found the opportunity: James Ward, for example, left behind a full-length of the lady in a state of nature. Sir Walter discovers an idealised portrait of Lady Hamilton in the "Musidora," and the suggestion adds interest to that single painting from the nude which the artist is known to have left finished.

In any case Graham left the house in 1786, and was succeeded by Richard Cosway, the miniature painter, whom Gainsborough had for a neighbour during the two last years of his life. The artistic tradition of the house, which included a tenancy by Jervas in the early part of the century, and of Nathaniel Hone later, was thus very





MUSIDORA



adequately sustained. Cosway's assemblies, the charms of his wife, the success of their musical receptions, the mob of fashion which filled Pall Mall on Sunday evenings in getting to and from his door,—above all, the private door which communicated with the gardens of the Prince's Gardens at Carlton House,—were all well-known features of the social life of London at the end of the century. Gainsborough's studio could not have been more profitably located for a fashionable portrait painter, and his rent of three hundred a year was a very good investment.

The London of 1774 was a widely different place from that upon which young Gainsborough had turned his back in 1746. Topographically, indeed, the town had changed little, for the beginning of the great expansion of London which we know waited upon the opening of a new century and the close of the Napoleonic wars. But in social and political matters there had taken place a change that was little less than fundamental. These were all concerned with the single fact that George the Third had succeeded his grandfather in the throne of these kingdoms, and had replaced the traditional policy of his house of leaving the government of the country to the great Whig families by a personal rule of his own. The continued advice of his mother, the Princess of Wales, "George, be a King," had been taken to heart, and by 1774 this young man of slender parts indeed, but of a monstrously firm will, had established a very real claim to that title. He had already proved himself as dexterous a maker and breaker of cabinets as had ever put finger into a political pie. The King had succeeded in smashing the great Whig confederacy which had been accepted as the bulwark of his throne for three generations; he had humbled men like Chatham, and had concluded, of his own motion and in the face of the Whigs, a peace with

France, in which half the fruits of the great Minister's long struggle with that nation were thrown away. By his personal oppression of all who opposed him, George the Third had introduced the rancour of politics into private life. Men who in either House of Parliament ventured to oppose his measures, whether the conclusion of a treaty of peace or the passage of a Royal Marriage Act, were taught to regard themselves as His Majesty's personal enemies. Those, on the other hand, who did his bidding, and were needy, were known openly as the King's Friends, and were provided with all sorts of comfortable sinecures about the Court, of £500 a year and upwards. At home George had convulsed the country during ten years by his treatment of Wilkes, and had invested that agreeable vagabond, who had never acted rightly in his life, with all the glamour of a popular hero and martyr. He had wrecked government after government, controlled Whigs of all shades and colours, Chathams, Pelhams, Graftons, Rockinghams, and had at last taken the government virtually into his own hands, with the amiable North as chief clerk, and with the avowed object, as he declared, of restoring the constitution to what he called its "pristine lustre"; in other words, of restoring the Royal prerogative to a place of which the Stuarts hardly dreamed. The pair had already started that train of blunders which were later to result in the loss of the American Colonies.

We are here, however, more particularly concerned to note that in these political exercises the King made his influence felt far beyond the proper sphere of politics. All who were connected in any way with the Whigs, who opposed the King's policy tooth and nail, were prescribed at Court. Chief among these were the Duke of Richmond and the Marquess of Rockingham among the Peers, and Edmund Burke and young Charles Fox



among the Commons. Fox, to be sure, had begun his political life as one of North's minor satellites, but was just on the point of declaring himself in opposition and of becoming the most dangerous opponent of the Court, when he and his uncle the Duke of Richmond were destined to bear the full brunt of the King's oppression in their attempt to keep the lamp of liberty alight.

This attitude of King George towards some of his subjects had an indirect but important bearing upon Gainsborough's reception in London. Three at least of the leaders we have mentioned, and many others scarcely less eminent in the councils of the Whigs, were the personal friends and intimates of Sir Joshua Reynolds. It followed as naturally as the night the day, that, without any very obvious hostility on the part of His Majesty, there was still a constraint in all his relations with the President of the Academy. The King had little real taste for art, as is sufficiently shown by his patronage of men like West, and his preference of Allan Ramsay to Reynolds for the office of Court Painter, and he honestly believed that he had secured the better man when he gave Allan the post. His choice of Reynolds, too, as President of the Academy seems to relieve George the Third of the reproach of allowing his personal feeling to interfere with his duty in that matter, for, apart from the merits of his work, Reynolds's manners and bearing made him a very stately figurehead for such a Society. And yet it is undoubted that the King's personal feelings contrived to make themselves felt. Reynolds, no doubt, as the friend of such men as Wilkes, Burke, and Charles Fox, felt a certain self-consciousness in his contact with His Majesty; and we know that the King, though personally very civil to the painter, gave sittings to artists of all degrees, with the important exception of the President

of his own Academy, until Reynolds insisted upon the opportunity of painting His Majesty as a condition of continuing in the post. All these incidents in the relations of the Court and Gainsborough's chief competitor for fame had a not unimportant bearing upon the reception of that painter by the King. It is certain that, without acknowledgment of the position, Gainsborough, soon after his establishment in London, virtually assumed the office of Painter to the Court and Royal Family.

Gainsborough must have noticed no less of a revolution in artistic matters in London than in those which were governed by political and social considerations. There was a vast change in taste and in the encouragement given to the arts since the old days with Francis Hayman and the St. Martin's Lane Drawing School. Gainsborough's old master was still alive, and was eking out what must have been a precarious practice as a painter, by the salary attached to the office of Secretary to the Academy. Hudson, too, was still above ground, but nearing his end. But the traditions of his art and the fame of Kneller were no longer the standards of taste in this country. Reynolds primarily, as having caught the eye of the town seven years before Gainsborough began to be known at Bath, Gainsborough himself, and Romney in a lesser degree, had already worked a revolution in artistic ideas in London. There was a crowd of less famous but still competent men who were yearly helping to form public taste by the exhibitions of the Academy, and, as Reynolds said to Northcote, who was on the point of setting up for himself about this time, Hudson and Kneller would not do in 1774. The public required something better than Kneller's periwigs and interchangeable faces, or Lely's eternal smirk and simper. London, for a really competent portrait painter, was a paradise during the

eighteenth century. Hudson himself, and that in the face of Reynolds's newly discovered genius, never lacked sitters. Reynolds had stepped into the most lucrative practice as a portrait painter ever known, without any period of probation or anxiety. Romney, two years before Gainsborough's move to town, was making a thousand a year at low prices when he decided to leave London for Rome, and was returning to a still greater success in Cavendish Square in this very year. We have seen what little trouble Gainsborough found in attracting sitters at Bath; his good fortune in this important matter was no less signal in London.

The relations of these three eminent artists, all in practice in town at the same time, are full of interest, and have inspired much comment, mainly to the prejudice of the most successful of the three—Sir Joshua Reynolds. He is accused of envy and jealousy, both of Gainsborough and Romney, but with very little foundation of fact. Some natural feelings of the sort there certainly were, but these were not confined to Reynolds, and it was human, after all, to feel some concern at the success of such rivals in a field which at first was almost a monopoly of his own. But of anything but the most correct conduct on the part of Reynolds towards Gainsborough there is no trace whatever. No sooner had Gainsborough settled in Pall Mall than Reynolds called upon him. Gainsborough never returned the call. Some years later, Gainsborough wished to have sittings from Reynolds. Reynolds gave them, but they were interrupted by his illness, and that they were never concluded was entirely owing to Gainsborough's whimsical temper. The story of this incident is very well related by Northcote in one of his reported conversations, who, however, spoke from inside information, and the jealousy of which he speaks

as existing between the painters, though well known to him, was never shown by any overt act—on Reynolds's side at least.

"Sir Joshua," said Northcote, "had a high opinion of Gainsborough, and very justly; but Gainsborough and he could not stable their horses together, for there was jealousy between them. Gainsborough, I remember, solicited Sir Joshua to sit to him for his portrait, and he no doubt expected to be requested to sit to Sir Joshua in return. But I heard Sir Joshua say, 'I suppose he expects me to ask him to sit to me; I shall do no such thing.' Sir Joshua had a paralytic stroke, which interrupted the painting of his portrait; when he recovered he sent word to Gainsborough that he was ready to resume his sittings, but the latter declined to take them up again, having found out, I suppose, that his contrivance did not take."

There is nothing related here of which Reynolds need be ashamed, and, notwithstanding the natural feelings of rivalry which Gainsborough undoubtedly shared, he was never less than just in his references to Gainsborough's painting and in generous appreciation of his success. Reynolds remarked to Sir George Beaumont, in going the round of one of the exhibitions, "I cannot imagine how he manages to produce his effects." "Damn the fellow, how various he is!" was Mr. Gainsborough's comment on the work of the President. Reynolds in 1782 was the first to welcome a masterpiece in Gainsborough's "Girl and Pigs," which he bought for sixty guineas, the price named by the artist. It is said, indeed, that he resold it to M. de Calonne for a hundred guineas, and gave Gainsborough the enhanced price—a story we do not believe for a moment: first, because the painting was undoubtedly in Reynolds's possession some years later, but chiefly because Gains-



borough was the last man in the world to put himself under an obligation to his rival by accepting any such gift. Reynolds was never backward in acknowledging Gainsborough's great abilities as an artist; on one occasion, indeed, he got into serious trouble with Richard Wilson in so doing. Reynolds, fresh from seeing one of Gainsborough's landscapes, came to the artists' club he affected, which met at the Turk's Head in Soho, and, without noticing Wilson's presence, remarked that "Gainsborough was certainly the first landscape painter in Europe." "And the first portrait painter, too, Sir Joshua," replied poor Wilson, who was justly nettled at what seemed a piece of deliberate bad taste on the part of the President. Reynolds apologised at having failed to notice Wilson's presence before making the remark.

It is only fair to say that there is no more evidence of any unworthy feelings of Gainsborough against his rival than the slight incidents we have quoted. There seems little foundation for any serious charge against either artist. Certainly it seems that the time has arrived when the tradition of malign conduct on the part of Reynolds against his great rival should be abandoned.

That a healthy rivalry shared by both artists existed is certain; it was, indeed, acknowledged by both; but it is just as certain that they both entertained the highest respect for each other as artists. The relations between Gainsborough and the Academy were never cordial, and it is quite probable that Reynolds as President incurred his full share of the wrath which Gainsborough at times poured upon that institution. Besides, any close relations between men of such widely different characters were impossible. Gainsborough, the creature of impulse, the cursing boon companion, the hater of intellectual conversation, the man who loved to hear

himself talk, and was rude to those with whom he differed, would have been bored by the suave President, and unbearable in his company. They had a common friend in Sheridan, and, as they never met at his table, there was probably an excellent reason for keeping the two apart. It may, indeed, have been that want of sympathy between two such characters that prevented the completion of those sittings given by the President to Gainsborough, and that unfinished portrait of Reynolds was quite probably abandoned in circumstances parallel to those which hindered the completion of the two portraits of Governor Thicknesse. We can even imagine Gainsborough giving the canvas of the rather smug features of the President a "wipe with the background brush" in his boredom at the prim talk and the ear-trumpet.

We have been unable to find any record of relations between Gainsborough and Romney, or of any indication of the light in which they regarded each other as artists. Reynolds was not fortunate enough to gain the approbation of that singular character, though here again there is little justification for the tradition that he was unjust to Romney. The tradition appears to have been founded upon a single remark of his, in which he was reported to have spoken of that painter as "the man in Cavendish Square." But the remark, which need never have been repeated, seems no very heavy indictment. The other grievance rests upon a cock-and-bull story solemnly related by the Rev. John Romney, B.D., Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, in the pious Memoir of his father, which he published in 1830. From this account it appears that in 1763, the year after his arrival in London, Romney painted a picture which he submitted in competition for the premium offered by the Society of Arts and Sciences. This was a picture

of the "Death of Wolfe," showing the General and his staff painted in their habits as they lived. It is interesting on that account, for a few years later Mr. West painted the same subject in the same style—a picture which was considered a great innovation in days when the historical style of painting was supposed to rest upon a classical rendering of all figures of history, who, if not represented in the nude, must be clothed in some abstraction of costume unknown to mortal tailors.

To proceed, however. The first meeting of the committee of the Society awarded the second premium of fifty guineas to Romney, but some demur having afterwards arisen as to the justice of the decision, a second meeting of the committee was called, and the adjudication was revoked. The prize of fifty guineas was then assigned to Mortimer for his picture of Edward the Confessor, and another premium created expressly for the purpose was decreed to Mr. Romney, "not as a compensation for any disappointment he might have suffered, but as a recompense due to the merits of his picture."

It is upon this incident that Mr. Romney founds a grievance for his father against Reynolds, without showing, however, that Reynolds was on the committee of the Society of Arts, which is more than doubtful; without bringing one jot of evidence to show that, if he were he was actuated by any motive but that inspired by the merits of the pictures to be judged; and without showing that even Romney himself was aggrieved. Hayley, indeed, who was the elder Romney's contemporary and wrote his life, states the exact contrary. Says he:

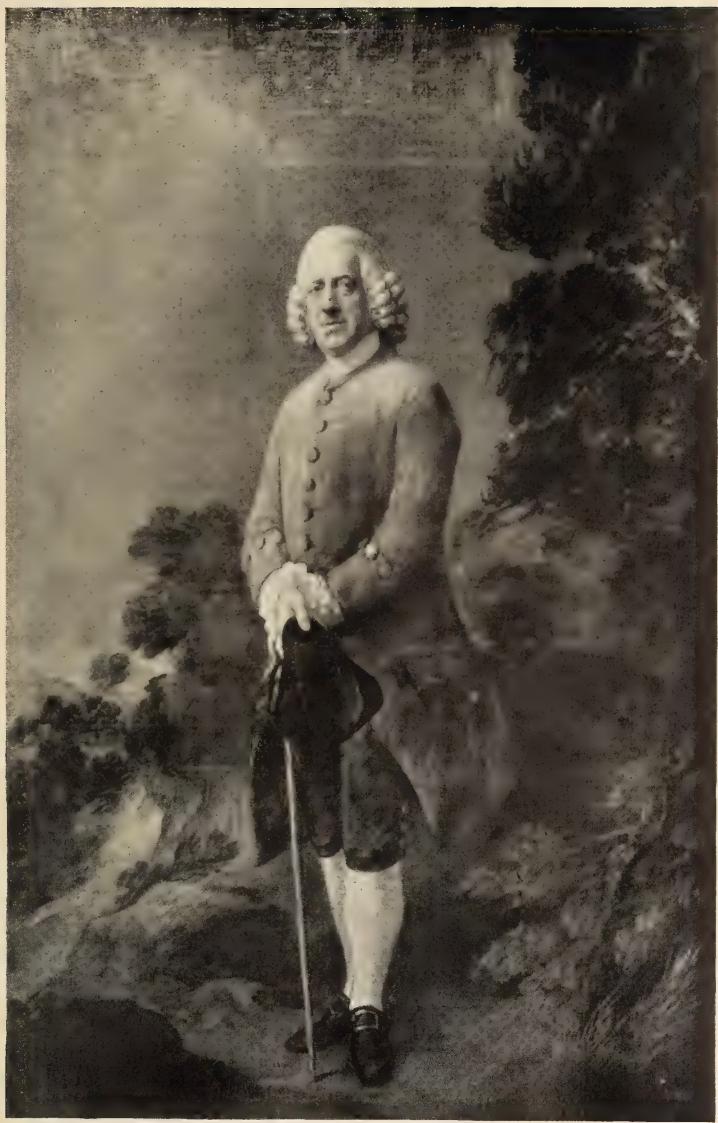
"The candid Romney, in relating this very interesting incident of his life to me, completely absolved those judges of the contest who gave their final sentence against him. He told me, with that ingenuous spirit

which was one of his amiable characteristics, that Reynolds was the person who with great justice contended that the second prize of fifty guineas was due to Mortimer for his picture of "Edward the Confessor seizing the Treasures of his Mother," a picture which Romney most liberally acknowledged to be so strongly superior to his own "Death of Wolfe," that he was far from repining at the loss of a prize too hastily assigned to him, and he therefore accepted with lively gratitude a present of twenty-five guineas which the committee gave him, not as a compensation for an injury received, but as a free and liberal encouragement to his promising talents."

This canvas, by the way, is in the Council Chamber at Calcutta, where it was deposited by General Varelst, to whom it was given by Mr. Stephenson, the banker, who bought it from Romney for twenty-five guineas.

In the face of this evidence from the mouth of Romney himself, what use for his son to make absolutely unconvincing general charges against Reynolds of malign influence; that he hated Romney because he was a portrait painter; that he was the friend of Mortimer, and therefore opposed to Romney; that there was no intercourse between the two, "an additional indication of jealous feeling on the part of Reynolds"; that Northcote makes Garrick say of such and such a person, "He hates you, Sir Joshua, because you do not admire the painter whom he considers as a second Correggio." "Who is that?" "Why, his Correggio is Romney, the painter." The poor gentleman, indeed, naively concludes with a sentence which gives away his whole case: "I certainly never heard Mr. Romney express himself on the subject, but I have since understood from different persons at that time quali-





RALPH SCHOMBERG



fied to judge, that he was unfairly used on that occasion."

Much of this may be excused in a son with a natural affection and admiration for his father, but there is little excuse for the tittle-tattle of later biographers of both painters, who seem incapable of weighing evidence or of discovering its absence, and have, one after the other, represented Reynolds as an envious and unjust man, inspired by all sorts of unworthy motives against his rivals.

Fulcher, writing of the painter's first work in London, suggests that his removal from Bath was so sudden that "some time elapsed before he was able to take sitters," though we know not upon what authority. He adds, however, that Gainsborough received a summons from the palace to attend the King before he had been many months in London. It is certain that, whatever the date of the first, there was soon no lack of commissions from the Royal Family. "George the Third," says Fulcher, "had marked at the Academy annual exhibitions the beauty of Gainsborough's works, and there followed an imposing list of portraits by the artist of members of that august family." There were altogether seven representations of His Majesty, from the full-length in the robes of the Garter to the small miniature which was in the possession of Dupont; Queen Charlotte was painted, in all, no less than seven times, though it is probable she did not sit so often; and the whole Royal Family, with the exception of the Duke of York, appear in the great group at Windsor Castle.

Then Gainsborough painted the Prince of Wales and the Princess Royal as children, a picture exhibited at the British Institution in 1840 by its owner, Sir T. Baring. The Prince was painted alone with his charger in the canvas which was a pair to that of Colonel St.

Leger in the Royal collection; and again with Mrs. Fitzherbert, Lord Radnor, and Sheridan in a boat, "esteemed an admirable performance," says Fulcher—a picture once in the possession of Mrs. Norton. Gainsborough had the advantage of painting His Royal Highness nine times altogether, and it is to be hoped that he received payment for all these canvases.

Other Royal groups were the famous Elder Princesses, the Princesses Royal, Augusta and Elizabeth, the canvas about which, as we shall see, Gainsborough quarrelled with the Academy in 1784, and the same which some barbarian major-domo at the palace mutilated by removing a large slice from the bottom in order to squeeze it into a panel over a door. Then there are the canvas of the Royal children descending the steps of a lodge in Windsor Park, which belonged to Sir George Warrender, and was sold by him to M. Nieuwenhuys; two portraits of the Duke of Cumberland, six of his Duchess, and one of the Duchess of Gloucester.<sup>1</sup>

These complete Fulcher's list of the Royal portraits, which alone seem to entitle him to be considered as Court Painter, for it is certain that neither Allan Ramsay, who held that post, nor Reynolds, who succeeded him, ever painted King George and his Queen and Children in such variety. The advantages of the post of Court Painter, indeed, seem to have been chiefly the opportunity of a lucrative multiplication of portraits of the King and Queen from a single original. These copies were given as presents to ambassadors, to great people about the Court, and to other subjects who were distinguished by His Majesty's favour. Those of King George and Queen Charlotte from Mr. Ramsay's

<sup>1</sup> This portrait was purchased by Messrs. Agnew from the representatives of the late Duke of Cambridge in June 1904 for 12,100 guineas.



pencil are very common in England, and are to be seen at some of the older clubs like White's, and in the greater country houses. What we may call the intimate portraits of the Royal Family at this period were mainly painted by Gainsborough, and there are many recorded anecdotes of his relations with these great personages which resulted from his painting them so often.

Fulcher's list takes no account of the series of ovals, fifteen in number, which were exhibited in the Academy of 1783, and are still in the Royal collection, in which the painter preserves the features of most of the Royal Family. They comprised portraits of the King, the Queen, the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Clarence, the Princess Royal, the Princesses Augusta, Elizabeth, Mary, and Sophia, the Princes Ernest, Edward Frederick, Adolphus, Octavius, and Alfred. Angelo has the following remarks upon these portraits, and the delight which Gainsborough took in the subjects, which seem of interest:—

“Whilst my father was in attendance at Buckingham House, where he had the honour to give lessons to his present Majesty George the Fourth and his late Royal Highness the Duke of York, Gainsborough was busily engaged in painting separate portraits of the Royal children. He used to tell my father he was all but raving mad with ecstasy in beholding such a constellation of youthful beauty. Indeed, he used sometimes to rattle away in so hyperbolical a strain upon the subject of his art, that any indifferent observer would have concluded the painter was beside his wits.

“‘Talk of the Greeks!’ he would exclaim, ‘the pale-faced, long-nosed, unmeaning visaged creatures. Look at the living, delectable carnations in the Royal progeny. Talk of old dame Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi,’ addressing himself to his own painted resemblances of

the sons and daughters of his Royal employers. 'Sir, here you behold half a score of youthful divinities—look, ye gods—'

"'Hist,' my father would say; 'Mister Gainsborough, you will be overheard, and we shall both be sent to St. Luke's.'

"'St. Luke's, sir,' replied the madcap; 'know ye not that I am a painter—ergo a son of St. Luke?—ha, ha!'

"Gainsborough's gaiety of manner and lively though respectful conversation were agreeable to his Royal patron. The Queen also spoke of him with esteem. His portrait of Her Majesty in court dress, in the possession of our present sovereign, is one of the most comprehensively incomprehensible, strange, fine pictures in the world—a sort of marvel of art.

"When occasionally taken there by my father to see the palace, I have often beheld this series of portraits, entirely busts and in uniform frames, and certainly they might be safely matched for nobleness of countenance, purity of complexion, and sweetness of expression, against any family, the children of the same parents, and win the prize of beauty.

"This interesting collection of portraits decorated the walls of a small apartment of her late Majesty, Queen Charlotte of inestimable memory, where she, as I have been informed, delighted to sit, thus surrounded with the faithful resemblances of her numerous and beloved children."

Gainsborough, from this and other accounts, was *persona grata* at the palace, and his rather bluff manners were apparently rather relished by King George. Fulcher refutes Hazlitt, who observed in his conversations with Northcote, "Gainsborough did not make himself agreeable at Buckingham House," by quoting the

Princess Augusta as reported by Mr. Leslie. The Princess remarked that the painter was a great favourite with all the Royal Family, and added an interesting anecdote:—

“One of the Princes died when Gainsborough was at Windsor, and day after day, as the King passed by the room in which he was employed, he saw him at work. The King desired a page to tell him to discontinue painting for the present. The page hesitated; the King repeated the command. ‘When your Majesty knows what Mr. Gainsborough is doing,’ replied the page, ‘I am sure—’ The King understood him; he was making a portrait of the dead child.”

Angelo supplies some further gossip, which shows the painter's relations with the Royal Family plainly enough. Angelo had made one of a party with Abel and Gainsborough on a trip to Windsor, which lasted three days, and relates the conversation which passed between the painter and the musician, during a visit they made to the castle:—

“If my memory may be trusted, he did not appear to think very highly of the pictures in the Royal collection generally. Some of the Vandykes rivetted his attention, however. The portrait of Queen Henrietta in white satin delighted him. ‘That woman had taste,’ said he; ‘why do not the French women dress with that elegant simplicity now? But she was the daughter of Henry the Fourth. Ye gods, how the French have degenerated!’

“‘Yes,’ said Abel, who was a man of observation, ‘but, howsomdever dat may be, vot a strange degeneracy of your countryvomans for to imidate all the drumpberry fashions from France.’

“‘True,’ replied Gainsborough, ‘I once, in conversing with His Majesty upon the subject of modern fashions,

took the liberty to say, "Your painters should be employed to design the costumes."

"'Vell, and I should tesire to know what observations His Majesty redurned, as he is a brince of gultivaded daste.'

"'What observation, man! Why, the King said, "You are right, Mr. Gainsborough; I am entirely of your opinion. Why do not you and Sir Joshua set about it?" adding, "but they are bewitching enough as it is—hey, Gainsborough, hey!"'

"'And what did you rebly to dat?'

"'Why, like a saucy dog as I am, what our gracious King listened to, and only answered with a smile. I said (faith, I am ashamed to repeat it), "Yes, please your Majesty, it were as well to leave the dowdy angels alone."

"Gainsborough was fond of relating the conversations which he had the honour of holding with the King. He always professed an esteem for His Majesty's judgment in the affairs of his own art. 'The King,' he said, 'is a good connoisseur, and conversant with the works of the old masters—much more so, indeed, than many of his courtiers, who held their heads so high upon the advantage of foreign travel; lordlings who, for all their pratings about carnations, contour, and gusto, prefer a racer to Raffaele, and a stud to the studio of Michael Angelo himself.'

"I remember Gainsborough relating to Sir George Beaumont, that one morning, whilst waiting upon the Queen at Buckingham House, His Majesty entered the apartment, and, whilst looking at one of the heads which Gainsborough had just completed, he turned suddenly and observed, 'I hope you have not entirely relinquished the study of landscape, Mr. Gainsborough?'

"'No, sire,' replied Gainsborough; 'I have been



honoured with commissions to paint several compositions of late, but my portraits must be completed, for I have received from my sitters sums in advance.'

"'Ay, ay, a good custom that—first set on foot by Sir Joshua, hey. An excellent custom. Yes, I respect your integrity; I am sorry to say, however, that there are some members of your profession who are not very conscientious upon that point. Yes, you are right; professional men cannot be too punctilious on these matters.'

"'Not, your Majesty, but what I prefer landscape painting.'

"'Doubtless,' replied the King, 'portraiture is a tantalising art—no pleasing your sitters, hey. All wanting to be Venuses and Adonises, hey. Well, Mr. Gainsborough, since you have taken to portraiture, every one wants your landscapes; is it not so?'

"'Entirely so, your Majesty.'

"'Ay, ay, that is the way of the world; I knew it would be so,' rejoined the King."

"The remarks of this painter were no less original than the style of his art. No doubt, his observations were interesting to the King, as His Majesty's perception was too quick and lively not to feel and enjoy the points they conveyed. Gainsborough used to observe 'that the King uttered more original *petits jeux de mots*, and in a playful style purely his own, than any person of rank he had ever known; but, as they were usually applied to the localities of the moment, they lost half their *naïveté* by every attempt at repetition.'

Before leaving the question of the Royal portraits, we may perhaps quote a story related of that of the Duke of York by a Mr. John Sewell, a gentleman who some years ago wrote with much knowledge to *Notes and Queries* upon the subject of Gainsborough and his

work. According to Mr. Sewell, the portrait of Frederick Duke of York is missing from the Royal collection, and was known to be in private hands during the lifetime of her late Majesty Queen Victoria. Mr. Sewell begins his communication by quoting the lines of Burns :

“For you Rt. Rev. Osnaburgh  
Nane sets the lawn sleeves sweeter,  
Although a ribbon at your lug  
Had been a dress completer.”

He suggests, too, that some official at the palace, not knowing that the Duke of York was the Bishop of Osnaburgh, had discarded the picture which represented him in that office from the Royal collection. “This picture,” says Mr. Sewell, “was brought under the notice of Her Majesty, who was desirous to complete the set of Royal portraits by that artist, and did not allow the price asked for it to be a consideration. But some doubts arose about the undecorated dress in which the portrait appeared, and as there was some uncertainty, the picture was returned to its owner, as it did not then occur to any of the parties that the Duke was also the Bishop of Osnaburgh.

“But my informant, one of the negotiators, on hearing the above lines from Burns recited at his centenary at the Crystal Palace, felt at once that the crux about the dress was solved, and that, like Burns, Gainsborough had painted the portrait of the Duke, not as a Royal Prince but as Bishop of Osnaburgh.

“The presumption is that the want of a ribbon at his ear or some other Royal decoration had led to the Duke’s portrait being turned out of the Royal collection as an unknown intruder, and that the same cause recently operated to prevent the re-entry of the Duke among his decorated brethren.”

We have Fulcher’s authority for saying that Gains-

borough, after his arrival in London, was soon overwhelmed with work, which, though probable enough, is almost certainly a surmise on the part of the author. "It was soon known," says he, "that the King and Queen had sat to Gainsborough; Peers and Commoners were not slow to follow the Royal example. Commissions for portraits now flowed in so fast, that, with all his rapidity of execution, he was unable to satisfy the impatience of some of his sitters."

All this is likely enough, no doubt, but this flow of patronage scarcely depended upon the Royal favour. Gainsborough was well enough known to secure constant employment, and the Royal patronage, though gratifying enough, had little to do with the crowds of sitters who besieged Pall Mall, just as other streams flowed into the painting-rooms in Leicester Fields and Cavendish Square.

In any case, if we are to believe an anecdote for which we are also indebted to Mr. Fulcher, Gainsborough preserved into these years much of the engaging independence which had marked his dealings with some of his sitters in Bath:—

"One gentleman lost his temper, and inquired of the porter in a voice loud enough to be overheard: 'Has that fellow Gainsborough finished my portrait?' Ushered into the painting-room, he beheld his picture, fresh from the pencil and complete to the gold buckles. After expressing his approbation, he requested it might be sent home at once, adding 'I may as well give you a cheque for the other fifty guineas.' 'Stay a minute,' said Gainsborough; 'it just wants the finishing stroke, and snatching up a background brush he dashed it across the smiling features, indignantly exclaiming, 'Sir, where is my fellow now?'"

The chronology of Gainsborough's work, ordinarily

difficult to follow by reason of the absence of titles and dates, is again complicated by his quarrel with the Academy, which kept his work from the exhibitions during the early part of his career in London.

The later changes in his art, too, are less well defined, and afford no parallel to that astonishing development in his powers which accompanied his removal to Bath in 1760. Since that first great development we discover no such dividing line in his work as appears, say, between the Admiral Vernon and the General Honywood, or the early landscapes in the National Gallery and the "Watering Place" in the same collection. But there are still boundaries which suggest themselves. Modern criticism is now pretty well agreed as to certain characteristics which distinguish his work at later periods, and in any representative collection of his portraits it is not difficult to range his canvases approximately at least in proper order.

Thus at the National Portrait Gallery may be seen a set of heads which are representative of his simple portraiture almost throughout his career. There is the Vernon of the Ipswich period, for example, with its conscientious rendering of the crimson coat, the hard line of shadow under the wig, the stiffness of the attitude, and the hand in breast and hat under arm, of the true Hudsonian formula. The National Gallery supplies us with a portrait of the very early Bath period, painted before the astonishing development represented by the Poyntz or Honywood, in the rather laboured head of Orpin, the parish clerk. The head of the Duke of Bedford at the National Portrait Gallery is a typical portrait of the middle Bath period, showing the warm colour, inclining to a bituminous quality in the background, red coat kept wonderfully in place, low tone throughout, and hatching in warm colour in the face.





THE DUCHESS OF DEVONSHIRE



The portrait of Stringer Lawrence in the same collection is another head of the same period, or perhaps a little later. The Lord Amherst, which hangs near it, is of a little later still, probably at the end of the Bath or beginning of the London period; and the Cornwallis, painted in 1783, is a typical head of the last period, with its cool colour, grey background, and free handling of the flesh. These heads are all very instructive for the student, being as they are without the distraction of pictorial treatment.

The tone of some of Gainsborough's best known work has been much altered by varnishing long since the painter's death. The large "Watering Place," for instance, was heavily varnished about 1839, when a critic in Blackwood congratulated the public on the improvement which he thought had resulted from the process. "It does not now look dingy," he said, "but is rich and transparent." The portrait of Henderson in the National Portrait Gallery has suffered much by the same treatment.

Characteristics of Gainsborough's portraiture and subject pictures during the first five or six years of his residence in London are a cooler scheme of colour and a restricted palette. The glow of the warm browns of the Bath period is left behind, brown backgrounds of plain heads are replaced by those of a soft grey, and the painter attains effects of rich colour by the interplay of a relatively few tints. Mr. Basset's famous "Cottage Girl" should, we believe, be assigned to the London period. Great differences of opinion have been expressed as to the date of this picture. Sir Walter Armstrong ascribes it to the Bath period; other writers have placed it among the canvases painted by Gainsborough in 1787, the last year of his life. This is an obvious mistake, as appears very convincingly from the following

notice of the canvas in the *Morning Herald* for June 6th, 1785:

"This delightful picture was sold to Sir Francis Basset of Tehidy Park, M.P. for Penrhyn, for two hundred guineas. The little subject of this piece was met by Thomas Gainsborough near Richmond Hill with the little dog under her arm, who is her companion on the canvas."

If this writer is to be relied upon, the picture is removed definitely from the Bath period. Gainsborough had a house or cottage up the river at Kew or Richmond, where portions of his summers were spent after he had settled in London. In any case, the picture presents that restraint of colour which is characteristic of what we may term his penultimate style. The colours of the landscape are repeated in different depths of tone in the figure, the warm greys of the sky in the coat of the dog, and are relieved alone by the brown pitcher and the tones of the flesh.

A little later in the same period, perhaps, comes the charming canvas of the little Miss Haverfield in the Wallace collection, one of Gainsborough's most delightful presentations of childhood. This picture of the little girl tying her black coat across her white frock, may in one of its aspects be considered an example of Gainsborough's skill in suggesting rich colour with the very slightest expenditure of positive tint.

The superb *Perdita* in the same gallery is an obvious pair to Lord Rothschild's magnificent Mrs. Sheridan. The attitude of the figures is similar; they are both seated upon a bank in the open air; the brown tones of the Bath period have disappeared; and the feathery touch and the high tones of the typical "silvery Gainsborough" of the last years of the painter's career are not yet reached. In both, too, appears that tinge



of exquisite melancholy which is found in his finest work—a quality, indeed, which it shares with the masterpieces of all art in all times. It was the intuition of a great artist which displayed this quality in such portraits as these and in that of Mrs. Graham—a quality quite in keeping with the destiny of all three of these beauteous young women. One might wish that poor Perdita Robinson had rested content with this record of her beauty in its prime. There is Reynolds's profile in the same gallery to heighten that wish, without counting the disenchantment which follows an inspection of that dreadful drawing of the lady in her later years in the National Portrait Gallery by Mr. George Dance.

There was a group of portraits painted by Gainsborough at this period which owed their existence to the feeling of clanship on the part of Mr. Villebois, the son-in-law of Sir Benjamin Truman, and a partner in the great brewing firm of Truman, Hanbury, Buxton, & Co. This gentleman, as Mr. Stephens informs us, caused this group of portraits to be painted, and directed that they should remain on the premises of the firm so long as one of its members bore the name of Villebois; further, that when this was no longer the case, the pictures should be sold for the benefit of the heirs of the family. The group included two of Gainsborough's finest feminine portraits in those of Mrs. Mears and Mrs. Villebois, both daughters of Sir Benjamin, and now in the possession of Mr. Alfred de Rothschild. They are both full-length standing figures, and must have formed a superb pair when hung together. Mrs. Mears leans with an arm against a pedestal, with her lilac-coloured dress over the left hand, showing a white petticoat and white shoes, and has the lofty head-dress of the period surmounted with flowers. Her sister is in a blue dress trimmed with pearls, a blue train, white satin petticoat and shoes, and

wears a scarf round her shoulders. They are both eminent examples of Gainsborough's genius, which was shared by Reynolds alone, in the triumphant treatment of feminine dress.

It is probable that the portrait of Sir Benjamin Truman himself was one of this group (the portrait now in the possession of Mr. H. Villebois), which shows the baronet at full-length, dressed in brown coat and breeches and yellow waistcoat, walking in a landscape near a piece of water. Another picture of the group was that of the Truman-Villebois boys, showing them seated near the base of a pillar in a garden, dressed in drab suits and with wide collars open at the neck, their hats on the ground, and building a house of cards. This may have been painted later, but the date seems indicated approximately by a letter of the painter to his sister, Mrs. Gibbon, written in the autumn of 1778, where he makes mention of Miss Read, Sir Benjamin Truman's granddaughter, as coming from Wiltshire to London on purpose to sit for him.

Probably the best known of Gainsborough's portraits of women, and the canvas most universally accepted as typical of his art of feminine portraiture, is that beautiful picture at the National Gallery in Edinburgh of Mrs. Graham. The treatment of this noble portrait, its perfect preservation, the beauty of the subject, the pathos of her history, all conspire to place this superb canvas among the most renowned of his works.

Mrs. Graham was a daughter of a family which supplied all the three great portrait painters of this period with some of the most attractive of their subjects. Her father, Lord Cathcart, sat to Reynolds for the well-known head, showing the mark of the pistol bullet he received at Fontenoy. He was very proud of the wound, and begged Reynolds to let the scar appear plainly in

the portrait. As he said, it was not every man who carried a bullet about in his head. Mrs. Graham's sister, Lady Mansfield, was that beautiful swan-necked lady who appears to such advantage in Romney's portrait at South Kensington—a picture which some consider that painter's masterpiece. The brother, afterwards the first Earl Cathcart, was painted by Gainsborough probably about the same time as his sister, though the portrait was returned to the painter for an alteration of the costume, when his Lordship had changed his profession from the law to that of arms, and wished his peer's robes to be painted out and a military uniform put in their place. The portrait, still in the possession of the family, was found in the studio after the painter's death, unfinished, but with a uniform dashed in at a sitting.

Lord Cathcart was bred to the law, but only held a single brief. This was to defend a woman who was indicted and condemned for murder. Lord Cathcart humanely took horse and galloped to London from the circuit in which he was practising, obtained a reprieve, and saved the woman's life, after which he entered the army and served with distinction.

The portrait of Mrs. Graham must have been painted soon after her marriage in 1774. Her husband was Mr. Thomas Graham, afterwards Lord Lynedoch, the distinguished soldier. His military career, a very notable one, was remarkable in some of its circumstances. He entered the army at the mature age of forty-three, as a distraction from his grief for the loss of his wife, who died on shipboard off Hyères in 1791, and to whom he was devotedly attached.

Graham first saw service in 1793 at Toulon, where he joined Hood's fleet and volunteered as aide-de-camp to Lord Mulgrave, and from that time until the close of the Peninsular War was almost continuously upon active

service. He served with distinction against the French all over Europe—at Quiberon, at Gibraltar, at Mantua under the Austrian General Wurmser (where he volunteered to get through the investing lines and carry news of the straits of the besieged garrison), at Minorca, Messina, and Malta. He was one of the few present at Sir John Moore's funeral at Corunna, and had acted as aide-de-camp to that able General. Graham's great military qualities first appeared perhaps at Barossa, where, however, his brilliant services were much prejudiced by the misconduct of the Spaniards with whom he was acting. Later he became one of Wellington's most trusted lieutenants, and fought with distinction at Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajos, and at Vittoria, where he commanded over forty thousand men, and he was with Wellington's victorious army which crossed the Bidassoa.

It is recorded of Lord Lynedoch that at the age of seventy-four he rode twenty-four miles to a meet of the Pytchley hounds, and that in his ninety-second year he hurried home from Switzerland to do homage to Queen Victoria on the occasion of her first visit to Scotland. He lived well into modern times, dying as he did at the age of ninety-five, in 1843.

It seems superfluous to say much of the portrait of Mrs. Graham, which is a national possession, apart altogether from its being in a public collection. A hundred reproductions of "Mrs. Graham by Gainsborough" have made us all familiar with its beauty. The canvas is so well preserved that it might have been painted within the last ten years instead of a century and a quarter ago. It has fortunately escaped the ferocity of the varnishers, who spoiled so many of the painter's works in the early years of the nineteenth century, and, as a fine example of Gainsborough's almost faultless technique, it is probable that, failing accident, it will





THE HONOURABLE MRS. GRAHAM



endure as long as paint and canvas may hold together, as a memorial of the genius of the painter and the beauty of the British women of his day. Pope's lines upon a picture of Jervas are much more applicable to this noble work :

“ Yet still her charms in breathing paint engage,  
Her modest cheek shall warm a future age ;  
Beauty, frail flower, that every season fears,  
Blooms in thy colours for a thousand years.”

There is an interesting note on page 25 of Cunningham's second volume of the *Walpole Letters* which relates to a portrait of a Major Johnston, painted by Gainsborough, presumably soon after his arrival in London. The information was supplied by a descendant of that gentleman, Colonel F. Johnston, in whose possession the picture was in 1857 :—

“ Major Johnston served at Dettingen and Fontenoy, . . . and was considered the handsomest man and best swordsman in the army. . . . Many stories are told of his prowess during his youth ; and in those days, when gentlemen never appeared without a sword, any little difference was constantly settled on the spot, and in these he was always victorious. He was a great favourite with the fair sex, and indeed was so handsome and fashionable at this time, that Gainsborough requested him as a great favour to sit to him for his portrait, in order to bring himself into vogue, which he did, and, after the picture had been exhibited the usual time, the artist made Major Johnston a present of it, and it is now in the possession of Sir Alexander Johnston. Although considered a very good-natured man, he was sometimes known by the name of ‘ Fighting Johnston.’”

Another interesting figure of those times painted by Gainsborough towards the end of the 'seventies was Mr. William Almack, one of that group of able men

who made a living by catering for the pleasures of the aristocracy, of which Arthur and Martindale at White's, and Almack's successor, William Brooks, at Brooks's, were others. Almack's real name was Macall, a Scotchman, who started life as a servant to James Duke of Hamilton. He married a sister of the local surgeon named Cullen, who was maid to the Duchess, and, under the auspices of that great family, the pair came to London at the end of the reign of George the Second. They established a coffee-house on the site of the present Marlborough Club, which was known as Almack's, Macall, having reversed the syllables of his name, in order to escape the unreasoning persecution which was the lot of most Scotsmen in England when George the Third came to the throne. Almack's Coffee-House became a haunt of the male fashion of the time, and one reads often slight references to the place in the annals of those days,—how Harry So-and-so drank himself to death at that place of entertainment, for example; or of Lord March dining there with George Selwyn; or of a party of gentlemen tuning up at a catch club, which made the coffee-houseite rendezvous.

Almack's, however, is best remembered as the original of Brooks's, the great Whig club. To the coffee-house in 1764 came twenty-seven young seceders from White's, to form a club of their own, with Almack as "Master of the House," a club famous for a short time as "Almack's," and as the headquarters of the outrageous gaming of the day. Almack, after a few years of management, turned over the club to his head waiter, Brooks, who gave it his own name, and we may still recognise the same institution in the venerable Brooks's in St. James's Street. Almack himself opened in King Street what was described as "a ten-guinea subscription in three very elegant new built rooms." Such was the



origin of that famous institution known as Almack's Assembly, the resort of an exclusive fashion for dancing and social intercourse during nearly a century. The building may still be seen, much altered, in Willis's Restaurant and Messrs. Robinson & Fisher's Auction Rooms.

Almack in this new enterprise was eminently successful, and became, in his way, quite a personage. He sat to Reynolds as well as to Gainsborough. Both portraits show an oldish man of comfortable aspect, wearing the wig and long coat of the period. Gilly Williams, too, supplies a verbal sketch which helps to complete the personality of the excellent Almack. "Almack's Scotch face," writes he in 1763 to Selwyn, "would divert you, as would his lady in a sack making tea and curtseying to the duchesses." Almack later extended his operations, took over the Thatched House Tavern, and made a fortune. He died in 1781, after seeing his son well educated and entered at the Bar, and his daughter married to "Mr. Pitcairn, Physician Extraordinary to the Prince of Wales." The son inherited a large residuary estate, and died unmarried in 1806.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, in his discourse to the students of the Royal Academy in December of 1778, thus delivered himself:

"I must take this opportunity of mentioning one of the means of producing that great effect which we observe in the works of the Venetian painters, as I think it is not generally known or observed. It ought, in my opinion, to be indispensably observed that the masses of light in a picture be always of a warm mellow colour, yellow, red, or yellowish white, and that the blue, the grey, or the green colours be kept almost entirely out of these masses, and be used only to support and set off these warm colours; and, for this purpose, a small propor-

tion of cold colours will be sufficient. Let this conduct be reversed : let the light be cold and the surrounding colours warm, as we often see in the Roman and Florentine painters, and it will be out of the power of art, even in the hands of Rubens and Titian, to make a picture splendid and harmonious."

There is a venerable tradition, founded, we may suppose, on some contemporary gossip,—which delighted in exaggerating whatever little differences might exist between Gainsborough and Reynolds,—that this dictum of the President of the Academy was launched at the work of his rival, and that Gainsborough made an effective reply by painting the famous Blue Boy now at Grosvenor House.

There are several reasons to be urged against the present acceptance of this tradition, the most forcible of these being, that there is little doubt that the picture was painted several years before Reynolds delivered his lecture. A Mr. Joseph Hogarth, "a well-known and respected veteran in works of art, Mount Street, Grosvenor Square," was the first to record his conviction that the Blue Boy was painted in 1769, that it was "the portrait in a Vandyke dress which achieved for Gainsborough so great a success at the Royal Academy in 1770," and that it was the picture of which Miss Mary Moser wrote in a well-known letter in that year.

In that letter, written to Fuseli and describing the exhibition, that lady said, "It is only telling you what you know already of the exhibition of 1770, to say that Gainsborough is beyond himself in the portrait of a gentleman in a Vandyke habit." There seems confirmation of the theory that Miss Moser was here describing the Blue Boy, in a conversation recorded by J. T. Smith, in *A Book for a Rainy Day*, where he makes note of the following scrap of talk between himself and his friend

Taylor, a teacher of drawing, who had studied under Francis Hayman, and died at the age of ninety-eight in 1838:—

“Did you know Gainsborough, sir?”

“Oh, I remember him; he was an odd man at times. I recollect my master, Hayman, coming home after he had been at the exhibition, and saying, ‘What an extraordinary picture Gainsborough had painted of a Blue Boy; it is as fine as Vandyke!’”

“Who was the Blue Boy, sir?”

“Why, he was an ironmonger. He lived at the corner of Greek and King Streets, Soho; an immensely rich man.”

It seems unnecessary to travel beyond these facts to fix the date of the picture, a point in itself of small importance, apart from the tradition of its origin of which we have taken note. Gainsborough left many male portraits in the Vandyke manner,—those of young Canning, of his nephew Dupont, and the Pink Boy among others,—but none which quite justify Miss Moser’s raptures, except the famous canvas belonging to the Duke of Westminster. J. T. Smith could hardly have committed so glaring an inaccuracy as is involved in any doubt of his report of the conversation with Taylor; and if we accept that conversation as authentic, the mention of Hayman, who died in 1776, alone disposes of the accepted tradition of the anti-academic origin of the picture, and places the Blue Boy among the productions of Gainsborough’s later years at Bath.

Certainly the work, apart though it is in some ways from anything else the painter ever painted, has a greater affinity for his portraits of that period than for those of the later period of his work in London, and leans more towards the solid painting of those middle years of the painter’s career than to the ethereal quality of his last

work. Assuming for a moment that the picture had its origin in the circumstances which have so long been accepted as authentic, it is certain that Gainsborough rather evaded than overcame the difficulties set out in Reynolds's dictum. The boy is dressed in blue, it is true, but there is little of pure blue on the canvas, and the undoubted harmony of this superb picture is produced by the breaking of the crude colour by a most cunning treatment of the half tones and shadows of the dress, which are blended with warm tints, and the consequent avoidance of the large masses of bleak colour which were the essence of Reynolds's proposition.

However, there seems little necessity to take this passage of Reynolds's discourse very seriously, or as a criticism of Gainsborough's method. Sir Joshua's warmest admirers have long rejected the Discourses as of any great value as contributions to the theory of painting. As Ruskin said, Reynolds spent his life in disproving his theories by his practice. There is at least one canvas of the President, which violates with a perfect success every rule addressed to the students in December of 1778. Lord Mayo's fine portrait of Archbishop Bourke at Palmerstown is a triumphant vindication of Reynolds's own power of producing a harmonious piece of colour by the employment almost alone of masses of cool colour, and by the avoidance of any of the warm tones he so recommended. The black robe, the cool grey of the lawn sleeves, the restraint in the flesh tints, and the absence of any large masses of warm colour in the accessories of that portrait, are a refutation of Reynolds's recipe as complete as Gainsborough himself ever painted.

Reams have been written upon the history of the Duke of Westminster's picture, its adventures, its successive owners, and the claims of certain copies or replicas



to rank as the original. It seems to be generally accepted that the picture represents a young Buttall, the son of a prosperous ironmonger who lived in Soho, and whose name is to be found in the London Directory as living at 31 Greek Street so late as 1794. It is difficult, however, to know what brought the youth to Gainsborough's studio at Bath in 1769. The identification of the sitter rests upon a declaration of Mr. Jackson of Exeter, who first mentions young Buttall as the subject. Turner, according to Mr. Thornbury, was of opinion that the portrait represented a member of the Molyneux family, the Earls of Sefton; but this point, again, seems of small importance. The whole matter received a copious discussion in a correspondence which ran through many issues of *Notes and Queries* in the years 1869 and 1870.

That correspondence arose out of the exhibition of another Blue Boy at a conversazione of the Institute of Civil Engineers in 1867, a picture which a member of the Institute, Mr. John Sewell, championed as the original, with much ingenuity and vehemence, but without shaking the claims of the Grosvenor House picture to that distinction. The picture then exhibited is now in America, and has never been seen side by side with the Duke of Westminster's portrait, so that a discussion as to their respective merits must be more or less academic. But so many points of interest appeared in the discussion, that its chief features may be mentioned here, if only as a contribution to the history of one of Gainsborough's best-known works.

It would seem that the original Blue Boy was in the possession of young Buttall until about 1796, after which year it passed into the hands of George, Prince of Wales. This is quite likely, for we see elsewhere that that highly placed individual was disposed to show a great interest

in Gainsborough's works after the painter's death. Later the work passed to a Mr. John Nesbitt, a gentleman who is well known to students of the period as a boon companion of the Prince. The transfer of the picture is thus described in Thornbury's *Life of Turner* by the Rev. J. T. Trimmer, vicar of Marston-on-Dove, in Derbyshire, a gentleman qualified to speak with some authority on Gainsborough, as grandson of the painter's great friend Joshua Kirby, and the son of the interesting Mrs. Trimmer, whom we saw as a prim girl recommending Gainsborough as a model of deportment to her brother, then his pupil at Ipswich.

Says Mr. Trimmer: "Many years ago there resided at Heston a Mr. Nesbitt, a person of substance and a companion of George, Prince of Wales. He once possessed Gainsborough's Blue Boy, and in the following way. He was dining with the Prince. 'Nesbitt,' said the Prince, 'that picture (pointing to the Blue Boy) shall be yours.' At first he thought the Prince must be joking, but, finding he was decidedly serious, Nesbitt, who was a beau of the first water, made all suitable acknowledgments for H.R.H.'s generosity, and next morning the Blue Boy arrived, followed in due time by a bill for £300, which he had the satisfaction of paying. I heard Mr. Nesbitt many years ago tell the story at my father's table."

The picture was later in the possession of Hoppner, with whom it was probably deposited by Mr. Nesbitt, or he may have sold it to the painter. In Hoppner's studio probably originated the two copies known to exist—that in America already mentioned, and another in France. From Hoppner the original passed into the possession of Earl Grosvenor early in the last century, and it has remained at Grosvenor House since.

Mr. Sewell, however, read the facts differently, and



THE BLUE BOY





was throughout the prophet of the copy, which he regarded as the original, and declared the Grosvenor House picture to be an inferior reproduction, probably by Hoppner himself. He contended that the original Blue Boy was deposited by Mr. Nesbitt at Hoppner's, and that it returned into his possession about 1815, from whom a Mr. Hall acquired it in 1819. Mr. Hall kept the picture during his lifetime, and at his sale in 1858 it was bought by a Mr. Dawson. Mr. Sewell throws out dark hints as to the origin of the Grosvenor House picture, and traces it through various obscure dealers into the possession of Earl Grosvenor. But he probably convinced no one but himself, and stands convicted of a lamentable lack of critical acumen when he confesses to doubts as to the Duke of Westminster's picture being from the hand of Gainsborough at all.

## CHAPTER VIII

LONDON—1775-1783

GAINSBOROUGH'S residence in London gave him a welcome opportunity of renewing his acquaintance with his brother Humphrey, who, as we saw in our first chapter, was settled at Henley-on-Thames. Fulcher says, which is most likely, that for this brother "Gainsborough ever cherished a warm affection, occasionally stealing a visit to Henley that they might roam together amidst its picturesque scenery." In any case, there is evidence of their intercourse in a letter written by the painter to his sister Mary (Mrs. Gibbon) at Bath, which, in the absence of any great number of letters by the painter, we give at length.

"LONDON, *Novr.* 13<sup>th</sup>, 1775.

"DEAR SISTER,—We return you our best thanks for the excellent present of fish, which turned out as good as ever was eaten, and came very timely for brother Humphry to take part with us. He went home to Henley to-day, having been with us ten days, which was as long as he could well be absent from his business of collecting the tolls upon the river. He was as well as could be expected, considering his affliction for the loss of his poor wife. We did all we could to comfort him, and wish him every possible happiness, as he is a good creature.

"My wife has been very indifferent with a disorder that goes about in all parts of London; it seems to be a sort of cold attended with a bad cough, and it has gone through our family, servants and all; but, thank God, we are upon the mending hand. We don't hear of many people dying of it, though it is universal.

"I am glad to hear business in the lodging-house way goes on so well. I know you would willingly keep the cart upon the wheels till you go to heaven, though you deserve to ride there in something better.

"I told Humphry you were a rank Methodist, who says you had better been Presbyterian, but I say Church of England. It does not signify what if you are but free from hypocrisy, and don't set your heart upon worldly honours and wealth. I wish you long life and happiness, and remain, your affectionate Brother,

"THO. GAINSBOROUGH."

This letter seems to preserve for us some particulars of one of the first recorded visitations of influenza to this country. It would appear also that Humphrey Gainsborough added to his ministerial duties the avocation of a toll-keeper at the various locks on the Thames.

It was only a year later that Gainsborough wrote another letter to Mrs. Gibbon, recording the final close of his renewed intimacy with his brother:—

"*Nov. 5th, 1776.*

"DEAR SISTER,—I have been going to write to you every post for this month past, but was desirous of acquainting you with what I had done towards settling my brother Humphry's affairs, and therefore postponed writing until I had sold the stock. Mr. Cooper advises me to keep on the house till we can make the most of

the steam engine (as the work if taken to pieces perhaps may never be put together again), and also the maid in the house, lest any discovery should be made of it.

"The goods are sold, but none of the books, nor have I any account yet from Henley, so as to be able to settle anything. We may hope you and Sally continue in good health and good bustling spirits, and join the best affections to you both."

A letter of this period, quoted by Fulcher, furnishes us with material for speculations of more or less interest upon the subject of Gainsborough's womenkind, who appear as rather nebulous images in the scanty annals of the painter. The letter is eloquent also of the prosperity of the artist, who indeed had written previously to Mrs. Gibbon congratulating himself that professional matters were "everything that the heart could desire, and that he was living at a full thousand a year." From Fulcher we learn that this prosperity was reflected in the possession of a coach of his own, which was no doubt a concession to the views of his wife and daughters in the matter of an equipage suitable to their importance.

"Gainsborough," says Fulcher, "was glad of any pretext for a journey into the country. 'My family,' wrote the painter, 'had a great desire to make a journey to Ipswich to Mr. and Mrs. Kilderbee's for a fortnight, and last Sunday morning I packed them off in their own coach with David on horseback, and Molly wrote to me to let me know that they arrived very safe; but, somehow or other, they seemed desirous of returning rather sooner than the proposed time, as they desire me to go for them by next Tuesday; the bargain was that I should fetch them home.

" 'I don't know what's the matter: either people don't



pay them honour enough for ladies that keep a coach, or else Madam is afraid to trust me alone in this great town.'"

The letter is not without suggestions of humour. Mrs. Gainsborough, with the glamour of her mysterious birth, which she held to be royal, with her present prosperity, and with the acknowledged beauty of her daughters, no doubt visited her native county with anticipations of something like a triumphal progress. Gainsborough's two married sisters, and Scheming Jack and his wife at Sudbury, who by all orthodox precedents should have swelled her train, may possibly have been moved by less worthy but more human feelings, and some little show of envy may have led, as Gainsborough seems to think, to the shortening of the trip. In any case, it is the last one hears of the coach, which, according to Fulcher, Gainsborough disposed of, "finding it either as useless as Hogarth's forgotten equipage, which he left at the Mansion House while he ran home in the rain, or that it made an unprofitable inroad upon his income. He was, however, too proud to be seen using a hackney coach; the pride of the artist operated like the humility of the trainband captain, and the chaise was not allowed to drive up to the door."

That same use of the hackney coach was an occasion for a dissertation by the faithful Thicknesse, who by no means lost sight of Gainsborough in the removal to London, but continued his acquaintance with the painter from his own house in town. This is another reason for our doubt that he had as much to do with the removal from Bath as he would have us to believe. Gainsborough certainly would never have undergone the pangs of a removal of his household as a means of getting rid of the Governor at Bath, only to encounter him in London. That they were often together after

1774 in town seems quite clear, if only from passages like the following from the Governor's memoir:—

“Vanity or affectation, I care not which way it is construed, will not let me withhold a little domestic occurrence. My departed daughter, who had some claim to genius with her pencil, and now and then obtained a hint of importance from Mr. Gainsborough, had prevailed upon him to give her a little faint tinted drawing of his to copy, from which she made so exact a resemblance that at a slight view it was not readily distinguishable from the original. One night, *but after supper*, at my house in town, she laid her copy before him, said nothing, but waited to hear what he would say. Gainsborough, instead of saying anything, took it up and instantly tore it through the middle. The truth was, that inattention, good spirits, and a glass or two of wine had so cheered him that he thought it was his own, yet, at the same time perceiving that it was not quite so perfect as a work of his ought to be, he demolished it. It is scarce necessary to say that he made her a second amends for this compliment by presenting her with another drawing, which will never be torn.”

The Governor's homily on the hackney coach was one of those chastenings of poor Mrs. Gainsborough in which he managed to conceal whatever love he bore for that lady, who was alive when the Governor's little book appeared in 1788. It preserves the Governor's persistent belief in the ingrained parsimony of Margaret, and, besides throwing some light on the painter's character, does not lack the humorous quality of most of the author's dissertations:—

“But those who best loved Mr. Gainsborough and whom he most loved were unfortunately least welcome to his house, his table, and the goodwill of some part

of his family, for he seldom had his own way but when he was roused to exert a painful authority for it, and then he flew into irregularities and sometimes into excess; for, when he was once heated, either by passion or wine, he continued unable and unwilling also to do business at home, and at those times squandered away, fifty times over, the money which an extra joint of meat or a few bottles of port would have cost to have entertained his friends at home. I mention this, because, had it not been for such pitiful doings, he would still have been in all human probability the delight of his friends, and the admiration of the world for years to come. He had so utter a disregard to money, that *somebody* smuggled up in a few years at Bath five hundred pounds.

“Those who have sat to Mr. Gainsborough know that he stood, not sat, at his palette, and consequently, of late years at least, five or six hours’ work every morning tired him exceedingly, and then, when he went into the Park for a little fresh air or up in the city upon business, if he took a hackney coach to ease his tired limbs back again, he was obliged to be set down in St. James’s Square, or out of sight of his own windows, for fear of another set down not so convenient either to his head or his heels as riding out twelve pennyworth of coach hire, after having earned fifty guineas previously thereto.

“I have more than once been set down by him in that manner, even when I was going to dine with him, and have more than once been told *by him why we were so set down*. If, therefore, I have told this tale so severely, let it be remembered I have lost a friend whom I sincerely loved, and . . . ‘*Let the stricken deer go weep.*’”

There are certainly confirmatory statements by

others as to Mrs. Gainsborough's careful habits, but, in the light of what we know of Gainsborough's good-nature and prodigality, we think perhaps they were excusable, and even creditable, to that lady.

Another of the few glimpses we are vouchsafed into the domestic affairs of the painter is to be gained from a letter he wrote to Mrs. Gibbon early in 1780, from which we gather his views upon the courtship between Johann Fischer and his daughter Mary, which we noticed in its origin at Bath:—

“*Feb. 23rd, 1780.*

“DEAR SISTER,—I may imagine you are by this time no stranger to the alteration which has taken place in my family. The notice I had of it was very sudden, as I had not the least suspicion of the attachment being so long and deeply settled, and as it was too late for me to alter anything without being the cause of total unhappiness on both sides, my consent, which was a mere compliment to affect to ask, I needs must give. Whether such a match was agreeable to me or not, I would not have the cause of unhappiness lay upon my conscience, and accordingly they were married last Monday, and are settled for the present in a ready furnished little house in Curzon street, Mayfair.

“I can't say I have any reason to doubt the man's honesty or goodness of heart, as I never heard any one speak anything amiss of him, and as to his oddities and temper, she must learn to like them as she likes his person, for nothing can be altered now. I pray God she may be happy with him, and have her health. Peggy has been very unhappy about it, but I endeavour to comfort her, in hope that she will have more pride and goodness than to do anything without first asking my advice and approbation.

“We shall see how they go on, and I shall write to



you further on the subject. I hope you are all well, and, with best wishes, I remain, your affectionate Bro.

“THOS. GAINSBOROUGH.”

This is no cheerful letter inspired by the happy omens of an auspicious marriage, and we are afraid that the further letters which he wrote to Mrs. Gibbon on the subject were of a very gloomy character. All Gainsborough's pious aspirations in this matter were doomed to disappointment. The marriage, from what we know of it, was a hopeless one almost from the first. There is no evidence that this was the fault of the bridegroom, and Gainsborough at least may have consoled himself with the thought that the parties were at least old enough to know their own minds. Mary was thirty and Fischer forty-seven, and they had had six years at least in which to discover each other's faults.

Fischer was apparently a man of rather eccentric disposition, and certainly had his fair share of professional pride. This is a story of him in Kelly's *Memoirs*, which exhibits this phase of his character very well indeed:—

“Being much pressed by a nobleman to sup with him after the opera, Fischer declined the invitation, saying that he was usually much fatigued, and made it a rule never to go out after the evening's performance. The noble Lord would take no denial, and assured him that he did not ask him professionally, but merely for the gratification of his society and conversation. Thus urged and encouraged, he went. He had not, however, been many minutes in the house before his Lordship approached him and said, ‘I hope, Mr. Fischer, you have brought your hautboy in your pocket.’ ‘No, my Lord,’ said Fischer, ‘my hautboy never sups.’ He turned on his heel, and instantly left the house, and no persuasion could ever induce him to return to it.”

We need not, however, seek for reasons for the failure of his alliance with Mary Gainsborough in the character of Fischer: these existed, we are afraid, in the character of poor Mary herself. She was of extraordinary beauty, "but was subject to occasional aberrations of mind." The pair were separated within a short time of their marriage, and never resumed their relations. Poor Mary lived till 1826, her mental malady increasing upon her yearly; though her father was spared the pain of the worst of the trouble, the manifestations of which appeared only after his death. Mary believed, says Fulcher, that the Prince of Wales was desperately in love with her. Sir Walter Armstrong adds a family tradition, to the effect that the first intimation of her mental condition appeared when she went to a West End shop and ordered silk, satin, and linen by the hundred yards.

After Mrs. Gainsborough's death in 1792, Mrs. Fischer joined her elder sister Margaret in housekeeping, whose mind, we are told, was in a worse condition than her own. She announced that she received no untitled visitors, and those who desired to see the poor creature accordingly were accustomed to assume titles for the purpose. She seems to have harped upon that penchant of the Prince for herself to the end. Before her death she begged leave to present His Majesty King George the Fourth with her husband Fischer's portrait, painted nearly half a century earlier by her father, which accounts for that picture being in the Royal collection to-day. One wonders, in the light of this, whether indeed that graceful, graceless Florizel of the 'eighties, who was so free of his glances in those early days, and afterwards for that matter, ever sent one in the direction of poor Mary Gainsborough.

Fulcher tells us that the elder of the sisters, Margaret, inherited all her father's fondness for music, and "played





MARGARET GAINSBOROUGH



very exquisitely upon the harpsichord." Queen Charlotte on one occasion expressed a wish to hear Miss Gainsborough's performance, but the young lady was out of temper, and refused to gratify Her Majesty.

Gainsborough's portrait of poor Margaret hangs in the National Gallery to-day. It shows a brown-haired woman of about five-and-thirty, nearly in profile, in a black dress against a grey sky. The bust is painted in an oval cunningly broken by a curtain on the left, and is an altogether satisfactory specimen of the painter's more simple portraiture of the later period. The features are comely and even beautiful, but a receding forehead and a rather vacant expression seem to give a pathetic suggestion of the malady with which Margaret's later years were clouded.

The marriage of his daughter to Fischer enables us to date with reasonable accuracy the trip which Gainsborough made with Abel and Fischer to Eton and Windsor, from Harry Angelo's account of which we have already quoted. It is improbable that the painter and the hautboy player remained on terms of intimacy after the separation from his daughter, so it seems pretty certain that the following relates to the year 1780 or 1781. It is perhaps the fullest account existing of Gainsborough in his leisure moments, and seems to confirm Thicknesse's estimate of Mrs. Gainsborough's thrifty character. It adds, too, to our knowledge of the interest which the King and Queen took in the painter and his affairs:—

"Once in company with this original painter and my old friend Abel, I made a trip to Windsor, where we passed the afternoon and evening at the Swan, near Eton Bridge. This evening is the more memorable from the circumstance of having met that eccentric and inscrutable humourist Fischer, the musician there, who,

as I before observed, was son-in-law to Gainsborough, having married his daughter.

"It was said, and has been almost generally believed, that scarcely any professional man distinguished for genius or great abilities could be six hours in Windsor without its being known to some member of the Royal Family, if the King and Queen were then residing there.

"Fischer was a favourite of both their Majesties; the King in particular was greatly amused by his bonhomie; for, though he was sparing of his speech, yet the few things he uttered were generally so original and so entirely to His Majesty's taste, that he usually reported the good sayings of Fischer to the Queen and Princesses, which were sure to excite their risibility.

"Gainsborough, afraid of his wife, and consequently ill at ease at home, was not entirely comfortable abroad, lest his Xantippe should discover what he expended on his rambles. It is true that he was no economist of his cash, but the parsimony of his lady was beyond the endurance of any man possessing the least spirit of liberality, and Gainsborough was liberal to excess.

"Fischer, who, on the contrary, was anything rather than an uxorious spouse, used to banter his father-in-law on this submission; particularly as Gainsborough's income was large, and he was known to be so eminently bounteous to his wife; for, excepting the ready cash which he kept in his purse, she was, as Fischer said, 'receiver general, paymaster general, and auditor of her own accompts.'

"It is known that at the Castle the families of the parties who are honoured with the Royal notice not infrequently became objects of minute inquiry; not from any unwarrantable motive, of course, but rather, as Dr. Johnson was wont to say, from that laudible curiosity which delights in the development of character. How-

ever this might have been, certain it is that many domestic family traits, little supposed by the actors themselves to be heard without their own walls, were whispered within the walls of the royal residence.

“It were vain, after all, to moralise severely on this propensity; for with princes, as with their subjects, whispering ever was, and ever will be, perhaps, in spite of charity, one of the most delectable of all mental occupations, particularly as it relates to the private moments of those we know most intimately or those whom we care the most about.

“‘Mr. Gainsborough is a very liberal man, is he not, Mr. Fischer?’ observed a great personage, once painted in a lace cap, lappets, and hoop.

“‘Yes, please your Majesty,’ replied Fischer.

“‘Which is not entirely agreeable to his lady?’ added the same Royal personage, with an inquiring smile.

“‘Nod at all so, nod at all, may it please you. Mine moder-in-law is twin sister of the old lady in Thread-needle Street.’

“Her Majesty smiled, which emboldened the humourist to subjoin, ‘She shall not be content, not if mine fader-in-law pour into her lap the amount of the national tebd.’

“Gainsborough during this trip was as usual in tip-top spirits. Everything which presented itself on the road from our passing the gate at Hyde Park Corner, all the way right and left to Windsor, begat an anecdote, a pithy remark, or some humorous observation. We agreed to club expenses, and travelled in a glass coach, for which he had, however, unknown to us, previously paid, observing, when we remonstrated, ‘Nay, it is but fair; we were to have posted it, but Abel (who was very corpulent) would have taken more than his share of the chaise; the coach, mark you, is mine own affair.’ On

this delightful journey I enjoyed his company three entire days.

"It forms not the least part of the pleasure, in looking back to this trip, to remember walking with this original genius through the State apartments of the Castle. I shall never forget the rapture he appeared to feel on gazing from the window of Queen Anne's china closet upon the magnificent prospect which suddenly burst upon his sight. 'Claude,' said he, 'could find no study in Italy comparable with this. Look, Abel, what say you to this? Mine ancient shepherd, the cattle grazing down there in the home park appear so many gems pinned on a cushion of green velvet; it is verily part of Dame Nature's old-fashioned toilet.'"

There is one more anecdote which appears to complete the scanty knowledge we are ever likely to acquire of Mrs. Gainsborough. It was related by Pearce, the friend of the Gainsboroughs in Bath, who apparently had the information direct from the best of all sources, Mrs. Gainsborough herself. Mr. Pearce, long after the painter's death, told it to a friend, who contributed it to a discussion on the painter and his works which raged in *Notes and Queries* some thirty years ago. It records poor Margaret's last contact with Royalty, and seems to possess a pathetic as well as a ludicrous interest:—

"The Prince was a well-known patron of Gainsborough when living, and, after his death, he, the Prince, sought to set the tide of fashion towards purchasing the unsold pictures at Schomberg House, where Gainsborough died. For this purpose the Prince paid a visit of condolence to Mrs. Gainsborough, and gave two thousand guineas for two landscapes, which he presented to Nesbitt's near neighbour, Mrs. Fitzherbert.

"To mark further his interest in and respect for the memory of Gainsborough, the Prince asked Mrs.



Gainsborough to call on him at Carlton House, but, unfortunately, Mrs. Gainsborough took this invitation as a compliment for herself; and if we give due consideration to the graciousness of the Prince working on her idea that she was a Prince's daughter, and if not then beautiful she had been so, we can excuse the widow's misconception in spending about £1000 in dress and jewellery wherein to appear at Carlton House.

"Upon her name being announced there, the Prince came to receive her with every respect, but observing that, instead of calling in becoming widow's attire, Mrs. Gainsborough was extravagantly dressed, he wheeled round without a word, to her great mortification, as she afterwards told the anecdote to Mr. Pearce, who mentioned it to our informant."

Whatever had been the differences between Gainsborough and the Academy, they were composed sufficiently to allow of the touchy painter availing himself of the exhibition of 1777, when he sent six portraits and a large landscape to Somerset House. There were whole-length portraits of the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland, of Abel the musician, and of Lord Gage; and anonymous portraits of "A Lady" and "Two Young Gentlemen." The landscape, which is difficult to identify, was described by Walpole, and was fortunate enough to receive that gentleman's approbation. "In the style of Rubens," he says, "and by far the finest landscape ever painted in England, and equal to the great masters."

The portrait of the Duchess of Cumberland, now at Buckingham Palace, was one of the many presentations of that lady by Gainsborough, and esteemed, as Walpole tells us, a "favourable likeness." The Duke and Duchess appeared to be very partial to Gainsborough as a portrait painter, for together they sat as many as twelve times

to him. The Duchess, as we know, was a very prominent figure in the social life of that period. She came of the Luttrell family, who were well regarded by King George as henchmen of the Court, and it was her brother the Colonel who represented the Court interest against Wilkes in the dire struggle of the Middlesex election. It is possible, however, that the King's favour declined when he heard from Calais that his brother had married the lady in 1771.

According to Walpole, this lady was much in love with her first husband, Mr. Horton, whom she lost with their infant daughter within a fortnight. There is an unusual touch of tenderness in Horace's mention of the poor lady's trouble, whom he describes as "covering her grief for the daughter in order to conceal the misfortune from the husband." For the rest, his description of the Duchess is a helpful commentary upon Gainsborough's fine canvas. "She was rather pretty than handsome," he says, "and had more the air of a woman of pleasure than a lady of quality, though she was well made, was graceful and unexceptionable in her conduct and behaviour. But there was something in her languishing eyes which she could animate to enchantment if she pleased, and her coquetry was so active and so varied, and yet so habitual, that it was difficult not to see through it, and yet as difficult to resist it. She danced divinely, and had a great deal of wit, but of the satiric kind; and as she had haughtiness before her rise, no wonder she claimed all the observances due to her rank after she became Duchess of Cumberland."

The portrait of Abel which Gainsborough sent to the Academy of 1777 is that now in the possession of Mr. Lockett Agnew, and was recognised at the time as a fine likeness. One can understand Gainsborough's interest in his friend and in music helping him in the

painting of the subject, with the result that we know, which has been described as the force of a sketch and the finish of a miniature. The jovial-looking musician looks up from the sheet of music paper, on which he is writing a composition at a table, with a large viol da gamba resting against his right knee, and with his Pomeranian under the table. This was one of the few pictures described in the catalogue with the name of the sitter, where it is mentioned as "Portrait of Mr. Abel."

The eight portraits which Gainsborough sent to the exhibition of 1778 have all been identified. One of the most interesting of these is the whole-length of James Christie, the eminent auctioneer—a fine portrait, still in the possession of the family, and one of the many complimentary portraits given by the good-natured painter to his sitters. It shows the auctioneer leaning on a framed picture, in which is displayed, as Mr. Fulcher observes, "a fine touch of landscape."

James Christie had been bred to the navy, but he resigned his commission to take up auctioneering, and held his first sale in 1766 at Dalton's Rooms in Pall Mall, rooms in which the exhibitions of the Incorporated Society of Artists were first held. Christie later moved next door to Gainsborough at Schomberg House, and was an intimate friend of the painter, as also of Reynolds and Garrick.

Christie soon became a very good judge of painting, and was an able man, well provided with the sort of eloquence necessary to his business. He left a family, all distinguished in their several walks of life; his successor in the business, James, was a noted antiquary; and two other sons, a soldier and a sailor, lost their lives on active service for their country. A son by a second marriage, Samuel Christie, was an able mathematician.

The most striking portrait of James Christie is the

etched profile by Dighton, showing him in the auctioneer's rostrum. An excellent medallion, modelled from this etching, was placed over the entrance of the great sale-room in Pall Mall a few years ago.

Another of the portraits of 1778 was one of the three canvases of Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire, which Gainsborough painted. It seems uncertain which of these it was, and whether this particular picture is still in existence. Walpole, who was at this moment in raptures over a presentment of the same great lady by Lady Diana Beauclerc, found Gainsborough's portrait "very bad and washy," though it is doubtful whether he went to the exhibition in a very impartial frame of mind, judging from his remarks on Lady Di's masterpiece. "The likeness," says he, "is perfectly preserved, except that the painter has lent her own expression to the Duchess, which you will allow is very agreeable flattery. What should I go to the Royal Academy for? I shall see no such chef d'œuvres there."

There is a tradition, however, that Gainsborough himself was dissatisfied with the portrait, which he refused to send to Chatsworth. We do not know whether Allan Cunningham's explanation of the failure is altogether reliable, but it is interesting and characteristic of that biographer's methods of expansion. "The dazzling beauty of the Duchess, and the sense she entertained of the charms of her looks and her conversation, took away that readiness of hand and hasty happiness of touch which belonged to him in his ordinary moments. The portrait was so little to his satisfaction that he refused to send it to Chatsworth." It is possible that this is the portrait which the painter, according to old Thicknesse, gave "a wipe with his background brush." It seems quite possible that Gainsborough took it back to his studio after the exhibition, with the hope of





THE BAILLIE FAMILY



improving it, and that the Duchess's impatience resulted in the tragedy recorded by Thicknesse. Other portraits of 1778 were those of Mr. and Mrs. Minet, one of Grace Dalrymple, of Clara Heywood, of De Loutherbouurg the landscape painter, and the portrait of the aged Lord Chesterfield.

Gainsborough sent yet another portrait of the Duchess of Cumberland to the exhibition of 1779, and one of the Duchess of Gloucester. Other portraits were the full-length of the Duke of Argyll, now at Inveraray, which is engraved in Graves's small series. It shows the Duke holding the baton of the Hereditary Stewardship of the Scotch Household in one hand, and resting the other upon a coronet. "Two Ladies," unidentified, a portrait of Judge Perrin, and a landscape which Walpole considered "most natural, bold and admirable," complete the list.

The portraits of 1780 have all been identified, and with six landscapes, "charming, very spirited, as admirable as the great masters," according to Mr. Walpole, make a list which speaks much of Gainsborough's active interest in his work in that year. The portraits were those of General Conway, Crosdale; the Rev. Mr. Gossett, the book collector; Dr. William Steevens, the Duke of Cumberland's chaplain; Madame le Brun, the vocalist; John Henderson studying a part (the portrait in the National Portrait Gallery); George Coyte, "alive," as Walpole says; Mrs. Beaufoy; and Bate Dudley, the editor of the *Morning Post*.

This is an interesting list, and is eloquent of Gainsborough's close professional connection with many phases of the life of his time. Mrs. Beaufoy, whose portrait is one of Gainsborough's many superb presentations of the feminine beauty of his day, was the wife of an eminent vinegar maker of that name. Madame le Brun was

the singer Francesca Danzi, who had made her first appearance at the Opera in 1777, where her singing had attracted great attention, and in this year she had been promoted to the position of prima donna. Her portrait, once in the possession of the Duchess of Montrose, is a three-quarter length, and shows the lady seated in a chair, resting her face on her left arm.

The "General Conway" of the catalogue is Field Marshal Conway, Horace Walpole's cousin and correspondent, the brave but not brilliant soldier, and honest but hesitating politician, who perhaps filled a greater place in the affairs of his day than his parts warranted. Walpole, who used his influence over Conway as a means of gratifying his own spite, makes him a great hero, but he was certainly not the phoenix that that interesting writer pretends.

Conway, who politically was a shuttlecock of the abler politicians of the Whig party, was one of the victims of King George the Third, who dismissed him from all his places for voting against the Court in the Wilkes matter. It is to Walpole's credit that he offered Conway a fortune at this crisis, which Conway very honourably refused. It was said of him that he was a better soldier than general, and a better general than statesman; but he was an amiable and popular man, singularly handsome and well favoured, and possessed of a nice sense of honour in an age of corruption.

The bust portrait by Gainsborough of that truculent hero, the Rev. Mr. (later Sir Henry) Bate Dudley, hangs in the National Gallery, a canvas which is very typical of Gainsborough's simpler portraiture. Later, in 1785-86, he painted at Bradwell a full-length portrait of Bate Dudley with a dog—a pair to that of his wife, a sister of Mrs. Hartley, the actress. One of Bate Dudley's enemies, of whom he had many, remarked of this por-



trait, "The man wants execution, and the dog wants hanging."

It is difficult to say anything new about Bate Dudley, the "Fighting Parson," friend of the Prince of Wales, dramatist, magistrate, newspaper editor, Canon of Ely, duellist, agriculturist, and bruiser. One of the best known incidents of his life was that known as the "Vauxhall Affray," where, resenting the insolence to his sister-in-law of the wild Lord Lyttleton, the ruffian Fitzgerald, and their companions, he chastised one of them on the spot, and afterwards pummelled a prize-fighter whom Fitzgerald had disguised as "his friend Captain Miles" into a jelly at a tavern. Bate Dudley's journalistic exercises in the *Morning Post* often brought him into trouble, but he died finally in his bed in the year 1824, and, the eccentricity of his life notwithstanding, appears to have been much respected.

In 1781 appeared George the Third in Regimentals, and the fine portrait of Queen Charlotte, which excited great interest. The inspiration which Gainsborough generally required in his subject to produce his best work was doubtless, in the case of the Queen, supplied by the glamour of her high station. It is certain that no painter ever did Her Majesty such justice. Some of the presentations by other men (Ramsay for example) are almost repulsive, while Gainsborough, in at least two of his canvases, treated the subject with a refinement as great as that with which he presented his most beautiful sitters. "I do believe," said a writer at the time, "that Opie would have made a calf's head look sensible, as Gainsborough made our old Queen Charlotte look picturesque." This is no great compliment to Her Majesty, but flattering to the painter. Northcote, however, who must have seen the Queen often, seems worth quoting about this fine portrait:—

"His whole-length portrait of Queen Charlotte is equally fine: with what a graceful sweep she seems to move through the picture! 'Tis actual motion, and done with such a light, airy facility, it delighted me when I saw it. The drapery was done in one night by Gainsborough and his nephew; they sat up all night, and painted it by lamp-light. This, in my opinion, constitutes the essence of genius, the making beautiful things from unlikely subjects."

Other pictures at the 1781 exhibition were the portrait of Bishop Hurd, now in the Royal collection, one of Gainsborough's *Shepherds*, and three *landscapes*, which seem to show that he had made some artistic expedition to the seacoast. Walpole describes two of these as "so fine and natural that one steps back for fear of being splashed."

Notable pictures of the exhibition of 1783 were the *Colonel Tarleton*; *Mlle. Baccelli, the dancer*; the "*Girl and Pigs*"; and the famous pair of the young *St. Leger* and the *Prince of Wales*. There was a *landscape* and five other portraits unnamed, making a total of eleven canvases.

Gainsborough's rivalry with Reynolds was perhaps at its height in this year, and is reflected in this list of portraits. It was noticed at the time that there was not only a competition in the choice of subjects, but even in the sitters themselves. Thus Reynolds sent to the same exhibition his superb portrait of *Tarleton*, so well known from the admirable engraving. Gainsborough, as if accepting a challenge, painted the same gentleman with his horse, and sent it to the same exhibition. It is unlikely that *Tarleton* would have wanted two portraits of himself in the same year, and his sitting to Gainsborough was probably the result of an invitation from the painter. Gainsborough having exhibited the spirited full-length

of Mlle. Baccelli dancing, Reynolds made haste to paint that lady, and in the following year produced that fascinating head of the dancer with the mask, which is one of the most attractive of his works of the kind.

Besides the "Girl and Pigs," which was acclaimed by many of his contemporaries as a masterpiece, perhaps the most notable of the painter's portraits in this exhibition were the pair of the Prince and Colonel St. Leger. These portraits were presented by each of the sitters to the other, which accounts for the presence of the St. Leger in the Royal collection. St. Leger came of an Irish family, afterwards ennobled as Lord Doneraile, was equerry to the Prince, and companion of His Royal Highness in the choicest of his revels. He was known as Handsome Jack, a title certainly justified by Gainsborough's presentation of his comely person, which is that of a typical blood of the period. St. Leger's name often appears in the social annals of those times as the bosom friend of the Prince. "The Prince and the young men ride in the Hyde Park of a morning like madmen," says George Selwyn in 1781. "Young St. Leger and a gentleman whose name I know not, rode against one another to-day with such violence that one of them is thought to be mortally wounded. St. Leger is the least hurt." St. Leger, owing, no doubt, to his favour in high places, was Colonel of the Guards at the age of twenty-six, and rose gradually in the service to be Commander of the Forces in Ceylon, where he died in the last year of the century. He is credited with the doubtful honour of being the founder of the Hell Fire Club, and the peasants on the Irish estates of his family are still said to meet his spirit "drawn in a phantom coach by headless horses driven by a headless coachman, and attended by headless footmen."

Both of these pictures were well engraved—St. Leger

by young Dupont in one of his best plates, and the Prince by J. R. Smith. This last plate presents one of the humorous curiosities of engraving. As His Royal Highness grew older, the head was erased and re-engraved, and the youthful and comely face of the 'eighties was replaced by the rubicund features of later days in the nutty-brown wig from Truefit's, which the Regent affected in the early years of the nineteenth century. The slim figure, however, was left unaltered.

Other portraits of this year were a Mr. Fane, Sir Charles Gould, and Mr. Merlin.

Mr. Fane we have been unable to trace; Sir Charles Gould was a well-known lawyer and placeman of the times, and a favourite of King George, and in the stormy times following 1771, Gould as Judge Advocate General was fortunate enough to win the "favour and esteem" of that monarch "in no ordinary degree." He later assumed the names of Morgan, and the family was ennobled in the person of his grandson, who became the first Lord Tredegar. Gainsborough's portrait of Sir Charles is in the possession of the Equitable Assurance Society, by whom he was "requested to sit for his picture by Mr. Gainsborough in 1782."

"Mr. Merlin" we imagine to have been one of Gainsborough's many musical friends. In the picture of Fischer, his son-in-law, Gainsborough has inscribed the piano with the words, "Merlin, Londini fecit." Dr. Busby has recorded that Merlin was a man of some mechanical ability, and he seems to have been well ahead of his time when he invented the roller skate. He appeared on those ingenious contrivances at one of the masquerades at Carlisle House, where, deceived by the perfection of the lighting of the ballroom, he ran full tilt into one of Madame Cornelis's wall mirrors, which he had the misfortune to smash, pulverising a violin he was carrying,



and seriously wounding himself. In later years he set up a museum of musical curiosities in Princes Street, Hanover Square, which was well known among the minor amusements of the town as Merlin's Cave.

The artistic annals of 1782 are enlivened by the appearance among the critics of the exhibition of the redoubtable Wolcot, the ingenious "Peter Pindar." Wolcot was in London upon that strange enterprise of the partnership with James Oppy, or, as he preferred to call himself, Opie, the Cornish painter whom Wolcot had discovered in the west country, and had persuaded to come to town. The arrangement was that Opie should paint and Wolcot write, and the pair share the proceeds of their joint efforts. Opie, however, soon discovered that he had made a bad bargain, and the partnership came to an end.

Wolcot was himself an amateur of painting, and really a competent critic, who was a couple of generations ahead of contemporary connoisseurs in his ideas of art. He was one of the first to discover the great merits of Wilson's landscape, was an intelligent and appreciative critic of Gainsborough and Reynolds, and a terror to the pretensions, then almost universally accepted, of men like West or de Louthembourg. His happy idea of a versical commentary on the pictures added much to the interest of the exhibitions of 1782, 1783, 1785, and 1786.

Wolcot was very severe in his remarks upon de Louthembourg. That artist was a Belgian, who had begun his career in England by scene painting, and had been employed by Garrick in that art at Drury Lane. Afterwards he became a regular exhibitor at the Academy, and his pictures of mountain landscape had a certain vogue, and were bought by connoisseurs who were blind to the merits of Wilson and Gainsborough in the same branch of painting. Wolcot's verses upon the landscape painters

are so prophetic of the later verdict upon the works which he noticed, that they seem worth setting out at length.

Of Gainsborough's landscape he wrote :

“ Yet Gainsborough has merit too,  
 Would he his charming forte pursue,  
 To mind his landscape have the modest grace.  
 Yet there are sometimes nature's tints despised,  
 I wish them more attended to and prized,  
 Instead of trumpery that usurps their place ; ”

lines which perhaps could be justified by hostile critics of Gainsborough's landscape, which, after his early Suffolk period, is not remarkable for accuracy of natural detail. But Wolcot's ranking of Wilson and de Loutherbourg, though absolutely at defiance with the taste of his time, is more convincing to modern criticism :

“ And Loutherbourg, when Heaven so wills  
 To make brass skies and golden hills,  
 With marble bullocks in glass pastures grazing,  
 Thy reputation too will rise,  
 And people, gaping with surprise,  
 Cry ‘ Master Loutherbourg is most amazing.’ ”

But thou must wait for that event ;  
 Perhaps the change is never meant ;  
 Till then with me thy pencil will not shine ;  
 Till then old red-nosed Wilson's art  
 Will hold its empire o'er my heart,  
 By Britain left in poverty to pine.

But honest Wilson, never mind,  
 Immortal praises thou shalt find,  
 And for a dinner have no cause to fear.  
 Thou start'st at my prophetic rhymes ;  
 Don't be impatient for those times,  
 Wait till thou hast been dead a hundred year.”

Wilson, at the time these verses appeared, was dying at Llanberis, where he had succeeded to a small property from his brother ; and it is pleasant to think that his last

years at least were passed in comfort, and without those dreadful privations which attended his long struggle with poverty and the indifference of patrons in London. The exhibition of his works among the old masters at the Academy in 1902-3, and the general appreciation of his art which has at last arrived, is an eloquent commentary on Wolcot's prophecy.

Few either will quarrel with his estimate of de Loutherbourg, whose works now are rarely seen. It is claimed, however, for that painter, and apparently with some justice, that he was among the first to point out the fallacy of the opinion, then prevalent among amateurs of painting, that picturesque scenery worthy of the attention of landscape painters did not exist within the borders of the British Islands. It seems altogether to de Loutherbourg's credit that he set himself to combat that idea. He himself was familiar with the scenery of the Pyrenees, but he maintained that no English landscape painter need go abroad to seek inspiration, and that the Lake district of Cumberland, the rugged scenery of North Wales, and the mountainous grandeur of parts of Scotland, furnished inexhaustible subjects for native painters.

In pursuance of this plan, de Loutherbourg in 1782 opened an exhibition of moving pictures of English scenery, and in so doing perhaps provided the public with the first of those exhibitions which have since been so popular under the name of panoramas. This entertainment appears to have fascinated Gainsborough. "His sympathies," says Fulcher, "were so completely enlisted, that for a time he talked of nothing else, and passed his evenings at the exhibitions in long succession. He was indeed an enthusiastic encourager of every scheme for the improvement of his art, and himself loved to experimentalise."

The last exhibition of the Academy to which Gainsborough contributed was that of 1783, when he sent twenty-six canvases, twenty-three portraits, a landscape, a sea piece, and the subject picture of the "Boys and Fighting Dogs." The portraits included the set of ovals of the Royal Family, still in the Royal collection to which we have already referred—the "nest of Royal heads," as Wolcot called them. These heads contain some of his finest work, and others which are not so attractive. Among these last must be reckoned the head of the King himself. It is impossible to escape the conviction that Gainsborough's enthusiasm was little awakened by King George's features, and that, if he had been of less exalted station, the picture would have ended with "a wipe of the background brush." The Prince of Wales, on the other hand, is one of the finest of his Royal portraits, and preserves much of the charm which that personage undoubtedly possessed in his youth. The portrait of the Princess Elizabeth at the age of thirteen is also a typically charming specimen of the painter's minor portraiture in his later manner.

Among the other portraits was that wonderfully fine portrait of Sir Harbord Harbord, the first Lord Suffield, the property of the Corporation of Norwich—the result of a commission from the gentleman's supporters in that city, for which he sat in the House of Commons, "in testimony of their gratitude for his uninfluenced conduct in Parliament." In design this fine picture is very reminiscent of the Garrick at Stratford-on-Avon. Sir Harbord leans on a pedestal supporting a vase, and the picture is an example of the successful treatment of bright colours like the green and red of coat and waistcoat, in which Gainsborough excelled. Much of the charm of the painting, with the easy pose of the subject, is preserved in the admirable engraving by J. R. Smith.





SIR HARBORD HARBORD



Of the Mrs. Sheridan which appeared in 1783 we have already spoken. The Duchess of Devonshire of the same exhibition was that in the possession of Earl Spencer, showing the lady at full-length dressed in white, elbow on the base of a column, and with the legs crossed, and in a landscape background.

This lady, whom Gainsborough had first painted as a child of six, was at this moment perhaps the most notable woman in England. Her great beauty and fascinating manners made this most beautiful of the Spencers the admiration of all who came in contact with her. This portrait was painted on the eve of that famous political contest of 1784 at Westminster, when the Duchess and her sister Lady Duncannon canvassed the city on behalf of Mr. Charles Fox, and routed the opposing forces of the Duchess of Gordon and Lady Buckinghamshire. It was in that historical contest that the Duchess, as tradition asserts, sold her kisses to the burgesses for their votes; certainly she used her great beauty and charm to influence the voters in favour of Mr. Fox, with the success that we know. She herself, it was said, was much pleased at the remark of an Irish chairman, "Sure, I could light me pipe at her eyes."

Walpole, to be sure, characteristically declares "the Duchess of Devonshire, the empress of creation, is no beauty at all. She was a very fine woman, with all the freshness of youth and health, but verges fast to a coarseness." We prefer to believe the hundreds of representations of this great lady in which her beauty is preserved. In devoting herself to a public contest of this kind, the Duchess laid herself open to much scandalous abuse and coarse and scurrilous satire, but her charm of manner and sweetness of disposition still pervade the annals of her time. It was upon hearing of the death of this lady that George the Fourth, then Prince of Wales, remarked, "Then

we have lost the best bred woman in England," and Charles Fox replied, "Then we have lost the kindest heart in England."

The very curious history of one of Gainsborough's portraits of this lady, which has reached a definite stage within the last year or two, perhaps claims mention here. At the Wynn Ellis sale on the 6th June 1876 at Christie's appeared a portrait of the Duchess of Devonshire, which was the occasion of the following remarks in one of the accounts of the sale:—

"The last of the Gainsborough collection excited great interest. It was the celebrated picture of the Duchess of Devonshire, in a white dress and blue silk ribbons and a large black hat and feathers. Mr. Wood, the auctioneer, said the picture was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1783. It came into the possession of Mr. Ellis through Mr. Bentley of Sloane Street, who bought it privately from Mr. M'Ginnis. The auctioneer added that this was the finest portrait he had ever seen in that room, and it would have afforded him great gratification to have known that it was to be added to the National Collection. There was a little burst of applause at the beauty of the work when it was placed upon the easel, and without a moment's hesitation 3000 guineas were bid for it. Almost as quickly as the auctioneer could call them came offers of 4000, 5000, 6000, 8000, 9000, and 10,000 guineas. Then, after a slight pause, 10,100 guineas was called. Mr. Wood said that this was the highest offer ever made for any picture in that room, and he was very proud to receive it, especially as it was made for the greatest work of one of our own English school. He only hoped the work would be engraved. Mr. Wood knocked down the picture for 10,100 guineas to Mr. Agnew."

Mr. Wood's high opinion of the merits of this picture



was not shared by all who had the opportunity of seeing it, and it was well understood at the time that other elements than the intrinsic merits of the canvas went to swell the price it brought. That figure was, partly at least, the result of a contest between eminent representatives of the professional and private collectors of works of art. The picture, while in the possession of Mr. Ellis, had been drawn in monochrome with a view to its being engraved, and when it was taken out of the frame for that purpose and examined closely, those competent to judge were of opinion that, although undoubtedly begun by Gainsborough, it had been finished by another and much heavier hand, and the typical silvery colour of the master was found to be much obscured by an over-painting of a bituminous quality very reminiscent of Sir Thomas Lawrence. This opinion was confirmed by the further discovery that the canvas had been remounted upon a smaller stretcher than that upon which it had been begun, at some time after it left Gainsborough's studio. In the process of re-stretching a margin of some inches had been nailed round the back of the new stretcher, and this margin alone displayed the cool and silvery tints of Gainsborough's later manner, a quality which was in complete contrast to the front of the painting.

Three weeks after the portrait had been knocked down to Messrs. Agnew, and a few days after it had been exhibited at their gallery in Bond Street, then known as the New British Institution, London was startled by the news that the picture had been cut from its frame during the night and stolen. "The large printed placards in the windows inviting attention to the picture," says the *Times*, "were soon surrounded by little crowds, who read with no small astonishment the written notice that during the night some malicious person had cut the

picture from the frame and stolen it." The theft was evidently the work of an expert. The picture on its stretcher had been removed from the gilt frame on the wall by the simple expedient of bending back the nails, and the stretcher itself, bearing nothing but a clean strip of canvas upon which the portrait had been remounted, was left leaning against a sofa opposite the now empty frame. One very curious incident of the theft, not mentioned by the *Times*, was that the thief, who was obviously well acquainted with the processes of removing pictures from their frames, had come provided with all the necessary appliances, with the exception of a paste brush which is used for pasting thin paper over the face of a painting to prevent the cracking of the colour when it is rolled up face outward. This implement he had improvised by cutting out a foot length of the heavy purple cord which protected the picture from the spectators, and by unravelling the end to make a paste brush.

The clever thief succeeded in getting away with his booty and in eluding all pursuit. Messrs. Agnew at once offered a reward of £1000 for his detection and the recovery of the painting, but in vain. There were circumstances surrounding this robbery which make the success of the thief the more astonishing. The room itself, for instance, was only ten feet square, and had a single window looking upon Bond Street. This was found open, and it was conjectured that the thief must have concealed himself about the premises during the day, and, after having cut the picture from the stretcher, have lowered it to a confederate, and afterwards made his escape through the window.

His motive, too, was obscure, as the canvas was so well known and so famous as to be quite unsaleable. Some of us remember the hue and cry which arose

immediately upon the discovery of the theft. Photographs of the drawing made for the engraver were in every shop window within a week, the Duchess's effigy was upon every article of commerce, and the damsels of England proceeded to array themselves in different items of her costume—notably in the enormous hat, which was a striking feature of Gainsborough's design. The interest in the matter, however, gradually wore itself out, and was forgotten.

There was a mild revival of this interest among a new generation, when, in April of 1901, it was announced that a representative of the same great firm of art dealers had discovered the missing picture in the United States, and was returning with it to England. No authentic details of the recovery have appeared; the name of the thief, or terms upon which he restored the picture to its rightful owners, are unknown; but the picture duly appeared in London, only temporarily, for it is understood to have passed into the possession of an American millionaire for a very comfortable sum. All parties are thus to be congratulated—Messrs. Agnew upon the recovery of their property, the millionaire upon its acquisition at a figure suited to his financial dignity, and the art world of this country on having seen the last of a degraded work of one of her chief painters.

The reappearance of the canvas in England revived a rather unprofitable discussion as to the personality of the lady it represented. There were two claimants for this honour, each with a band of ardent partisans in the daily press and the magazines—Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire, and her successor Elizabeth, a lady well known during Gainsborough's time and long after as Lady Elizabeth Foster. Gainsborough left several studies for the arrangement of the picture, but only one of the face—a grisaille belonging to Lord Clifden. But

those who are familiar with the pictorial records of the time can have little doubt that the portrait represented the first of the ladies. Many persons thought otherwise, it is true, but a communication from the present representatives of the great Cavendish family which appeared in *Notes and Queries* ought to settle the matter beyond doubt. Mr. Vere Foster, a descendant of Lady Elizabeth, wrote to that journal quoting a letter from Mr. S. Arthur Strong, the librarian at Chatsworth, which said, "The hat picture which was stolen undoubtedly represents Georgiana," and giving at length a letter from Messrs. Agnew to the same effect.

The Lord Sandwich, now at Greenwich Hospital, is not one of the most attractive of the painter's male portraits, though its subject was one of the most interesting figures of his time, whose name had been before the public in a score of surprising incidents. He had incurred much odium by turning against his boon companion Wilkes, his associate in the infamous club at Medmenham, and by supplying to the authorities a copy of the *Essay on Woman* (till then only privately circulated among that hero's friends), upon which he was indicted. Lord Sandwich had earned the sobriquet of *Jemmy Twitcher* as a reward. When the mob attacked the Admiralty after the acquittal of Admiral Keppel, Lord Sandwich fled from the building with his mistress, and betrayed "most manifest panic," as the careful Walpole records. A year or two later, that hapless young woman, Miss Henrietta Rae, whom he had lived with for many years and installed at Hinchinbrooke, was shot dead coming from the opera by Parson Hackman, and the whole town rang with the pity of her history and the scandal of her relations with the Earl.

The Lord Cornwallis of this exhibition was the head, now in the National Portrait Gallery, of the able soldier,





MRS. SIDDONS



who, unlike many of his comrades in the disastrous war with the Colonies, retrieved the disasters of that campaign by his subsequent career in India.

The landscape and sea piece have not been identified. The "Fighting Dogs" is not one of the most attractive of Gainsborough's subject pictures. One youth of rather mild aspect is restrained from parting the dogs by his companion—an incident which introduces an air of sentimentality into the subject, which destroys its truth. The upper dog, too, is very reminiscent of Snyders, and Wolcot hinted broadly that the artist appropriated the whole animal from that painter, four of whose pictures were in his possession.

## CHAPTER IX

### LONDON: LAST YEARS—1784-1788

IT was in 1784 that Gainsborough arrived at his final misunderstanding with the Royal Academy, and withdrew in dudgeon from all connection with that body. There are several accounts of the circumstances in which the rupture took place—that of Mr. Leslie, who, in his life of Reynolds as an Academician, is perhaps unconsciously a little biassed against Gainsborough; that of Sir Walter Armstrong, who is certainly the painter's best apologist; and a joint account by Mr. Hodgson, R.A., and Mr. Eaton, the Librarian and Secretary of the Royal Academy, who wrote to the *Art Journal* of 1899 an article in which the correspondence between the parties is set out at length—a paper which is of great value, and must be accepted as an authoritative and final settlement of the matter. By the courtesy of the Council of the Academy, the present writer has had the privilege of seeing the original documents, and he has the further advantage of Mr. Eaton's permission to make full use of the article in the *Art Journal*.

After a consideration of this material, and with the best will in the world, it is impossible to absolve Gainsborough from the chief blame in the matter. Some little lack of pliancy on the part of the Council there may have been, together with a disinclination to humour the caprices of a petulant man, whose weaknesses they well



knew. This is certainly all that can be urged against that body. On the other hand, Gainsborough was distinctly the aggressor; and if he received little more than strict justice at the hands of the Council, it was all, in view of his previous attitude towards them, that he had a right to expect.

It is not generally known that the trouble began in the previous year, 1783, when Gainsborough sent the generous contribution of twenty-six canvases to the exhibition. Included among these were the fifteen heads of the Royal Family, which we noticed in the last chapter. Gainsborough wished these to be hung with the frames touching, in three lines of five each, and wrote to his friend Newton a letter, with a sketch in which he showed the exact order in which he wished the heads to appear:—

“DEAR NEWTON,—I would beg to have them hung with the frames touching, in three lines of five each in this order; the names are written behind each picture.

“God bless you. Hang my dogs and my landships in the Great Room. The sea piece you may fill the small room with.—Yours sincerely, in haste,

“T. GAINSBOROUGH.”

The Royal portraits thus arranged made one big panel, and there may have been some hesitation on the part of the hanging committee to devote a space of such dimensions in one room to the work of a single painter, or to adopt, for that matter, Gainsborough's directions for doing their own work conveyed in this debonair fashion through Newton. Some intimation to that effect no doubt reached Gainsborough, probably as a verbal communication by Newton, for there is no record of any official reply by the Committee or Council. In any case,

Gainsborough made no secret of his own feelings towards the Committee when he wrote to them the following extraordinary note :—

“ Mr. Gainsborough presents his Compliments to the gentlemen appointed to hang the Pictures at the Royal Academy, and begs leave to *hint* to them, that if the Royal Family, which he has sent for this Exhibition (*being smaller than three-quarters*) are hung above the line along with full-lengths, he never more, whilst he breathes, will send another Picture to the Exhibition.

“ This he swears by God.

“ *Saturday Morning.*”

There is no record of any reply to this note, nor is it mentioned in the minutes of the Council, but, as the pictures undoubtedly appeared in the exhibition of 1783, it is clear that the Committee humoured the painter's ill temper and ignored the unmannerly terms in which he expressed himself.

In the following year, 1784, Gainsborough prepared eight canvases for the exhibition. These were the Baillie Family (now at the National Gallery), the Tomkinson Boys, Lord Hood, Lord Rodney, Lord Rawdon, Lord Buckingham, Lady Buckingham, and the “Eldest Princesses” (that is the group of the Princess Royal and the Princesses Augusta and Elizabeth, the mutilated remnant of which we have already mentioned as still in the Royal collection).

The painter wrote a note accompanied by a sketch which named these pictures, and sent the frames of all of them for the assistance of the Committee, with the exception of the “Eldest Princesses.” This, as his note informed the Committee, could only come later with the

canvas, as "their Majesties are to have a private view before it is sent to the Academy."

Here, again, some communication must have reached Gainsborough which is not recorded in the correspondence or minute-books of the Academy. We have no means, therefore, of knowing its nature with certainty, but it is evident that it related to the position they proposed to assign to the group of the Eldest Princesses. At any rate, the painter wrote to the Committee a letter which, though couched in more civil terms than the comminatory one of the previous year already set out, left no doubt as to his feelings towards the body. In this he

"Begs pardon for giving them so much trouble, but he has painted the picture of the Princesses in so tender a light, that, notwithstanding he approves very much of the established rule for strong effects, he cannot possibly consent to have it placed higher than eight and a half feet, because the likeness and the work of the picture will not be seen any higher; at a word, he will not trouble the gentlemen against their inclination, but will beg the rest of his pictures back."

The pictures were returned accordingly, and Gainsborough never exhibited again, though there were some signs of reconciliation in the last year of his life, when, under the date of September 13th, 1787, the Council minutes record that

"Mr. Garvey reported that Mr. Gainsborough had promised to paint a picture for the Chimney in the Council Room, in place of that formerly proposed to be painted by Mr. Cipriani."

The painter's illness and death, however, prevented the accomplishment of the work.

We have examined the real facts connected with Gainsborough's misunderstanding with the Royal Academy, and it does not seem that they exhibit his temper in a very amiable light, or that much blame rests upon the Academy for their part in the dispute. It was really a very silly dispute, which a little concession upon either side might have prevented. Sir Walter Armstrong is of opinion that the facts have been "deliberately perverted," to the prejudice of the painter. The present writer can find no evidence of deliberate perversion by any one, but it is certain that the facts have been misunderstood, and by no one so woefully as by Sir Walter himself.

At the outset he confuses the exhibition of 1783 with that of 1784, and states, indeed, that the Baillie Family, the Eldest Princesses, and the rest of the eight canvases we have mentioned, were submitted to the Committee in the former year. This would have brought Gainsborough's contribution to that exhibition to thirty-four canvases. It is notorious that they were sent in in 1784, and were returned without being exhibited, in the circumstances stated above.

But Sir Walter commits his worst blunder when he makes Gainsborough's letter of 1783 (the "This he swears by God" letter) relate to the Eldest Princesses—a canvas painted and sent to the Academy a year later. That letter obviously refers to the fifteen heads of the Royal Family exhibited in 1783. Gainsborough himself uses the plural number: "If the Royal Family which he has sent for this exhibition, being smaller than three-quarters, *are* hung above the line," are his exact words.

Under this misapprehension Sir Walter creates a grievance for the painter, that his picture of the Princesses was denied a low place near the line, to which it was entitled as being less than a full-length. He





THE ELDEST PRINCESSES



argues that the major-domo at Buckingham Palace could scarcely have cut away near a half of the picture, which he must have done had it been a true full-length. But Sir Walter ignores Gainsborough's letter of 1784 altogether, though it clearly relates to the Princesses and was published by Leslie nearly half a century ago; and he fails to notice that Gainsborough's grievance, as stated in that letter, was that the "tender light" in which it had been painted, and the "likeness and work" of the subject, entitled it to a lower place than the usual full-length line to which it was assigned by the Committee. There is no complaint at all that the picture had been unjustly treated on account of its size.

Gainsborough's letter, indeed, raises a strong presumption that the mutilated picture was originally a full-length: "He approved very much of the established rule for strong effects," he says; that is, that whole-length portraits should go high on the wall, but objects to his own going there on account of its special qualities of "tender light," "likeness and work." The presumption is much strengthened by the fact that the replica at South Kensington shows the figures of the Princesses at full-length, and that Dupont's engraving in mezzotinto also exhibits the Royal ladies on the same scale.

Upon a review of all the facts, then, there seems little excuse for Gainsborough's attitude and the petulance of his communications to the Committee. It is certain that they were accustomed to some friction in their relations with the painter before 1783, and that the hectoring and domineering tone he adopted on that occasion was no new thing. His assumption, too, that he was conferring some great obligation on a body with whom he had never acted except to partake of the benefits of their exhibitions, was not a soothing element to introduce into the correspondence, and it is quite

possible that the Council were glad of an opportunity to bring their relations to an end. Northcote, in his recently published *Conversations with James Ward*, has a passage bearing on those relations, which we may perhaps quote in order to bring together all of what is known in the matter:—

“How did Gainsborough act in regard to the Academy?” asked Ward.

“He never came near it, he was too proud and satirical; he was not a person to be managed by such a set. I believe the only time he attended was to try to get Garvey admitted—an unworthy errand, certainly. He once sent some portraits to the exhibition, but would not submit to the regulation of hanging all portraits of a certain size above a certain height, or what we call above the line. He directed that his portraits should be hung exactly so many feet from the ground; but the Academy would not break through their regulations, so he cursed them all and sent for his pictures home again, declaring that they should never see another of his there.”

This unfortunate difference with the Royal Academy again complicates the task of assigning particular dates to the work of his later years. But the painter had now arrived at the very height of his powers, and there is little difficulty at pointing to a group of superb canvases which represent him at his best.

Very notable among these is that wonderfully fine specimen of Gainsborough's genre, “The Mall,” in the possession of Sir Audley Neeld. This represents, as few painters of any time or country could have rendered it, a characteristic phase of the social life of his day—the promenade of fashion in the Mall, the famous roadway which is just now losing its venerable identity in the new scheme for the Memorial to Queen Victoria.



The Mall, from the days of the Stuarts until the closing years of the eighteenth century, was the field upon which fashion, and feminine fashion especially, chose to disport itself. Twice a day social London donned its best apparel and took a turn under the trees, once at midday, and again, in summer, in its evening clothes after the early dinner. Here fashion met its friends, exchanged its repartees, made appointments for evening rendezvous at Ranelagh or Vauxhall, ate fruit or bought flowers from Betty's girl out of St. James's Street, or drank syllabubs from the red cows' milk, which was one of the attractions of the London parks. Nothing in the external aspect of London more struck the intelligent foreigner than the amenities of the promenade in the Mall. One of these gentlemen concluded an eloquent pæan on the beauty of the lady promenaders, by recording with rapture that of a morning the very ground glistened with the pins which they had dropped. The Mall indeed was the very shrine of flounce and fur-below until somewhere about 1795, when fashion unaccountably moved northward to the walk in the Green Park at the back of Arlington Street, and from there later to Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens.

The very spirit of this life is preserved in Gainsborough's picture, one of the few canvases in which he represents figures in motion; singular also among his work, in that it contains a score or so of figures. There is a central group of four ladies with an attendant cavalier advancing towards the spectator, a pair on the right, two pairs on the left passing each other, others again seated on the right. The accidental episodic quality of such a subject is perfectly conveyed—the transient glance of a passing woman, the turn of the neck appropriate to that attitude, the ground dotted with an occasional dog. Technically it represents Gainsborough

at his highest, where the solemn tones of his earlier manner have disappeared, and the very painting itself seems to echo his delight in the mastery of heightened luminous colour. The picture was among those left by the painter at his death, and in the middle of last century, after changing hands once or twice, it came into the possession of the family of its present owner.

In the *Mrs. Siddons* of the National Gallery, painted in 1784, when that lady was twenty-nine, Gainsborough painted one of the most interesting figures of his day in his finest manner. Here, if there be any truth in the tradition of his contest with Reynolds about the merits of cool colour in masses, which we doubt, is his reply to that painter's dictum in the *Discourse*. The great actress appears in little else than various shades of blue. The technique of Gainsborough's artistic maturity appears to the best advantage in this fine picture, and few of his canvases display more completely the light ease of his handling, the realisation of his subject without sign of labour, and his superb sense of restrained colour. Obviously also it is one of his most successful portraits, considered as a portrait merely. *Mrs. Jameson* has this note upon the subject: "Two years before the death of *Mrs. Siddons*, I remember seeing her when seated near this picture, and, looking from one to the other, it was like her still at the age of seventy."

A famous group of his late period is that canvas of *Squire Hallett* and his young wife promenading in a landscape with a dog, now in the possession of Lord Rothschild, which some critics acclaim as the painter's masterpiece—one, indeed, as the finest picture painted during the eighteenth century. Enthusiastic praise of that character is difficult to bestow in a just proportion, and one can remember so much without any attempt to belittle a fine performance. *Squire Hallett*, who was a

well-known light of the turf in his day, in a dark coat and white stockings, takes the air with his lady in the picturesque costume of that time—grey dress, yellow ribbons and large hat—in one of those wonderful landscapes with which Gainsborough's unerring taste environed his figures. The landscape contains a church, and Fulcher states a tradition that the picture was painted upon the wedding of the young pair, and represents their promenade on the first day of their wedded lives.

The full-length portrait of Dr. Schomberg in the National Gallery is another very important specimen of Gainsborough's later manner. Here, on the face of it, is an unpromising subject for a man of Gainsborough's temperament—a pursy-looking little man standing in faded pink coat and with hat and cane in hand in the open air, and yet the subject is transformed by the painter's genius into a perfect portrait picture. Schomberg was a descendant of the Duke killed at the Boyne, who gave his name to Gainsborough's house in Pall Mall. He stands looking at the spectator by the side of a torrent in a landscape, reduced almost to its elements by Gainsborough's method, which became the very shorthand of landscape art, and yet is entirely satisfying as an auxiliary to the chief interest of the piece.

In the same collection, rich indeed in the best of Gainsborough's art, is the small painting of young Vestris, an alert young fellow of two or three and twenty, the son of that great spirit, the "God of the Dance," who held that there were but three great men in Europe in his day—the King of Prussia, Voltaire, and himself. The age of the subject, with the bloom of youth on his cheeks, not less than the treatment, places this beautiful little portrait among the works of Gainsborough's last years.

The Lady Mulgrave, that famous oval which brought £10,500 by auction at Christie's a few years since, is

another of Gainsborough's finest works, painted quite at the end of his career. This is one of those inspired presentations of feminine beauty which at times tempt one to claim a place for the artist as a painter of women, beyond and apart from all other men who ever took a woman for their subject. The picture must have been painted in the last year of Gainsborough's life, and is a triumphant proof that his hand and eye and artistic understanding were at their highest efficiency to the end. This lady was a daughter of a Mr. Cholmley of Whitby, and married Constantine Phipps, the second Lord Mulgrave, in June of 1787. She was but eighteen at the time, and died untimely in the following year. The picture has unhappily gone to America, but its haunting beauty is familiar to rich and poor alike from a thousand adequate reproductions. It is one of Gainsborough's most joyous works, and altogether without that tinge of melancholy which pervades so many of his feminine portraits.

Gainsborough's last years were passed in much the same way as those through which we have followed him after his arrival in Bath in 1760: there was the steady labour of the painting-room through the five or six hours which he allotted from each day to his sitters, the society of actors and musicians during his leisure, and frequent excursions in the summer to his house at Kew and Richmond, varied by trips farther afield.

To notice these last first, Fulcher is our authority for the statement that Gainsborough's misunderstanding with the Academy, as well perhaps as the failure of the exhibition of his own work which he opened at Schomberg House, decided him to make a visit to his native place, "to divert the current of his thoughts." In any case, Gainsborough went to Ipswich; and Fulcher quotes a lady, whose father's guest he was, to the effect that the



painter created a sensation among his native villagers by "his rich suit of drab, laced ruffles, and cocked hat." This lady thought he was "gay, very gay, and good-looking." Fulcher adds that when he wrote, in 1856, it was still remembered that Gainsborough came to Sudbury to record his vote as a burgess of that borough.

It was perhaps de Louthembourg's exhibition of the scenery of this country, which we have already noticed as greatly interesting the painter, that suggested the excursion to the Lake district which he made in the autumn of 1783. This expedition is mentioned in the following letter to his old friend Pearce at Bath:—

"KEW GREEN.

"DEAR SIR,—I don't know if I told you that I'm going along with a Suffolk friend to visit the lakes in Cumberland, and purpose to show when I come back that your Grays and Dr. Brownes were tawdry fan painters. I purpose to mount all the lakes at the next exhibition in the great style; and you know, if the people don't like them, 'tis only jumping into one of the deepest of them from off a wooded island, and my reputation will be fixed for ever.

"I took the liberty of sending you a little perry out of Worcestershire, and, when the weather settles in hot again, should be much obliged if you and Mrs. P—— would drink a little of it, and fancy it champagne for my sake.

"I doubt whether I can shake you by the hand before I go, but when I come back I'll shake you by the collar if you'll promise to keep your hands still.—Believe me, dear sir, most sincerely yours,

"THOS. GAINSBOROUGH."

The Suffolk friend he mentions was Mr. Kilderbee,

his old neighbour at Ipswich, who found the painter on this expedition, according to Fulcher, a "most delightful companion." Nothing is known of the pictures which might have resulted from this journey, but the influence of the Lake country is traceable in much of Gainsborough's later landscape work, which deals for the first time with rocky foreground and mountain scenery. The exhibition of his paintings inspired by that northern journey was effectually stopped by the disagreement between himself and the Academy, which came with the following year.

The painter's correspondence with Pearce suggests that he still kept in touch with his old friends in Bath, and there is record of at least one journey to that city during his later days which preserves also a pleasant anecdote of his good-nature. A lady there named Mrs. Heathcote, who was in great distress at the loss of four children out of five in an epidemic, begged hard of the painter to paint her only surviving son. "No," he said; "I am here for a rest, and cannot do it." Mrs. Heathcote, much disappointed, went away. She, however, returned later to Gainsborough's lodgings with the boy, thinking, no doubt, that the painter might be touched by his prettiness. She was lucky enough to have dressed the boy in his ordinary everyday clothes. Gainsborough, on seeing the child, at once relented and consented to paint the boy; remarking, however, "If you had paraded him in fancy costume, I would not have painted him: now I will gladly comply with your request."

It is from such anecdotes as these that we get the only information available as to the painter's later years. It would seem, from the fact that he wrote from Kew Green to Pearce, and that he finally chose the church on the green for his burial-place, that he had a house or a lodging there for the summer months. Fulcher, however,



THE MALL





places him at Richmond, where, he says, he spent "mornings and evenings in sketching its picturesque scenery. When on his walks he saw any peasant children that struck his fancy, he would send them to his painting-room, leaving with their parents very substantial proof of his liberality."

One of the children he met in this way was Jack Hill, a good-looking child of some ten years and of great intelligence, whom Gainsborough seems to have encountered in a woodman's cottage. Gainsborough was so struck with the boy that he rather impulsively offered to take him home and provide for his future. The parents accepted the proposal, and the boy accordingly was taken into the Gainsborough establishment, much to the content of Mrs. Gainsborough, who was delighted with him. Mrs. Fischer, too, was enthusiastic, and wished to adopt Jack Hill as her personal property.

The experiment was not altogether successful, for the boy, after sitting for one or two of the painter's pictures of children, began to pine for his freedom. He at length ran away, and although he was brought back and kindly treated by the Gainsboroughs, he seems never to have made himself comfortable. Fulcher speaks of him as "wilfully throwing away a much better chance than Dick Whittington started with on his romantic journey." Mrs. Gainsborough finally procured his entry to the Blue-Coat School. Here, however, the urchin interests us as the original of the "Cottage Boy," the "Shepherd Boy in a Storm," and one or two others of Gainsborough's later subject compositions.

For details of the painter's life in London during his last years, we depend, as usual, upon references scattered about the gossiping memoirs of the time. We may think of him as renewing in London the acquaintances formed in Bath with men like Henderson, and of sharing

the diversions of the town with others of the same set, like John Beard and Paul Whitehead. His intimacy with Garrick lasted until the actor's death, in 1779, and through Garrick doubtless came the acquaintance with Arthur Murphy, of whom with Gainsborough at a coffee-house or tavern one catches a stray glimpse here and there in the social annals of the times.

Harry Angelo and John Thomas Smith, however, remain our chief authorities, and preserve the particulars of the painter's life in most detail. Smith, for example, was taken to the house in Pall Mall by old Nollekens, and has left the following account of the visit:—

"Upon our arrival at Mr. Gainsborough's, the third west division of Schomberg House, Pall Mall, the artist was listening to a violin, and held up his finger to Mr. Nollekens as a request of silence. Colonel Hamilton was playing to him in so exquisite a style that Gainsborough exclaimed, 'Now, my dear Colonel, if you will but go on I will give you that picture of the "Boy at the Stile," which you have so often wished to purchase of me.' Mr. Gainsborough, not knowing how long Nollekens would hold his tongue, gave him a book of sketches to choose two from, which he had promised him. As Gainsborough's versatile fancy was at this period devoted to music, his attention was so riveted to the tones of the violin that for nearly half an hour he was motionless, after which the Colonel requested that a hackney coach might be sent for, wherein he carried off the picture. It has been engraved by Stow, a pupil of Woollett. Mr. Gainsborough, after he had given Mr. Nollekens the two drawings he had selected, requested him to look at the model of an ass's head which he had just made.

"Nollekens: 'You should model more with your thumbs; thumb it about until you get it into shape.'

"Gainsborough: 'What!—in this manner?' having

taken up a bit of clay, and, looking at a picture of Abel's Pomeranian dog which hung over the chimney. 'This way?'

"'Yes,' said Nollekens; 'you'll do a great deal more with your thumbs.'

"Mr. Gainsborough, by whom I was standing, observed to me, 'You enjoyed the music, and I'm sure you'll long for this model: there, I will give it to you;' and I am delighted with it still. I have never had it baked, fearing it might fly in the kiln, as the artist had not kneaded the clay well before he commenced working it, and I conclude that the model must still contain a quantity of fixed air.

"Colonel Hamilton above mentioned was not only looked upon as one of the first amateur violin players, but also one of the first gentlemen pugilists. I was afterwards noticed by him as an etcher of landscapes, and have frequently seen him spar with the famous Mendoza in his drawing-room in Leicester Street, Leicester Square."

Angelo has an account of the painter's further relations with Bach and Abel, which, as it includes a mention of Fischer, probably relates to the year or two following 1780:—

"Bach and Abel, who were as intimate, as inseparable indeed, as Cipriani and Bartolozzi, were the only exceptions to this remark (*viz.*, that not one musician in twenty cared a straw for pictures). These two distinguished musicians were connoisseurs of pictures and prints, and in my younger days I remember the many happy hours, for many a winter season, that these four worthies passed under my father's roof in Carlisle Street.

"Gainsborough, as is sufficiently known, was an enthusiastic admirer of music, and, though certainly no

musician, yet his love of sweet sounds was such that he had tried his native skill upon almost every instrument. He was too capricious to sit and study any one methodically, though, having a nice ear, he could perform an air on the fiddle, the guitar, the harpsichord, or the flute. Under Fischer, his son-in-law, he did take a few lessons upon the hautboy or clarionet, I forget which, but made nothing of it. He, however, could modulate to a certain degree on a keyed instrument, and used frequently to chaunt any rhodomontade that was uppermost, accompanying himself with the chords on my mother's pianoforte.

"Bach, who had a true German share of dry humour, used to sit and endure his miserable attempts, and, laughing in his sleeve, exclaim, 'Bravo!' whilst Gainsborough, not at all abashed at his irony, would proceed, labouring hard at any particular key, be it major or be it minor, and drolly exclaim, 'Now for Purcell's chaunt; now a specimen of old Bird.'

"'Dat is debilish fine,' cried Bach.

"'Now for a touch of Kent and old Henry Lawes,' added Gainsborough, when Bach, his patience worn out, would cry :

"'Now, dat is too pad; dere is no law, by Goles, why the gombany is to listen to your murder of all these ancient gombosers,' when, getting up from his seat, he would run his finger rattling along all the keys, and, pushing the painter from his seat, would sit himself in his place, and flourish voluntaries as though he was inspired.

"Once Bach called upon him in Pall Mall, and, going straight to his painting-room, he found him fagging hard at the bassoon, an instrument that requires the wind of a forge bellows to fill. Gainsborough's cheeks were puffed, and his face was round and red as the harvest moon. Bach stood astounded.



“‘Pote it away, man, pote it away; do you want to burst yourself, like the frog in the fable? De defil, it is only fit for the lungs of a country blackschildt.’

“‘Nay, now,’ exclaimed Gainsborough, ‘it is the richest bass in the world. Now do listen again.’

“‘Listen!’ added Bach; ‘mine friendt, I did listen at your door in the passage, and, py all the powers above, as I hobe to be saved, it is just for all the world as the veritable praying of a jackass.’

“‘Damn it!’ exclaimed Gainsborough; ‘why, you have no ear, man—no more than an adder. Come, then’ (taking the clarionet).

“‘Baw, baw,’ exclaimed the musician, ‘vorse and vorse—no more of your canarding; ’tis as a duck, by Gar, ’tis vorse as a goose.’”

The elder Angelo lent his country house to the inseparable Bach and Abel, where they were often joined by Gainsborough.

“During this period Bartolozzi and Cipriani were constant visitors, and Gainsborough almost as frequently came over. I have before related how Bach and Abel obtained drawings from these former two artists; I may now add that Abel laid an impost upon the talent of Gainsborough. Doubtless it was the exchange for the notes of his viol da gamba that he obtained so many drafts upon the genius of the painter, whose prolific crayons supplied him with so many specimens of his art that on his return home my father found the walls of his apartment covered with them, slightly pinned to the paperhangings.

“These, many of them the best of his sketches, being executed con amore, Abel subsequently parted with, not for filthy lucre, but for the indulgence of that vanity which led many a wiser man than Abel to keep a

mistress. Signora Grassi, for whom he took a house in Frith Street, wheedled him out of these treasures of art, and, bestowing handsome frames upon them, they were made the decorations for the Signora's drawing-room. Thus Abel, before he had a house of his own, supplied his Dulcinea with a handsome one, and of course at considerable expense. The woman, though no beauty, was a wit, and called the apartment her Painted Paradise. Fischer, Gainsborough's son-in-law, though a man of few words, in making a visit there with his friend Abel, objected to this designation by exclaiming :

“ ‘ Abel, you are a fool, and mine fader Gainsborough is a blockhead ; for the only painted thing in the room is mine lady's cat face.’ ”

“ The lady was not present, but for her and himself Abel made no other return to Fischer for his German politeness than a most grave and profound bow.

“ Abel died, and, his Dulcinea going abroad, she parted with the house and furniture, together with this collection of Gainsborough's, which were sold by auction, if I can trust my memory, at Langford's Rooms, now occupied by Messrs. Robins, in the Piazza, Covent Garden.”

All these anecdotes seem to preserve for us at the end of his career the same Gainsborough whom we have watched from the beginning. Here is the hearty, plain-speaking good fellow, the artist ever ready to lay aside his pencil for the musical toys in which he was almost childishly interested, and the painter so prodigal of his work as to be eager to bestow a canvas worth a couple of hundred pounds upon any one who had given him a momentary pleasure. The interest, too, with which he turned to Nollekens for advice on his modelling seems to point to a continuing receptiveness of mind unusual in a man of his years, as well as to his delight in

occupations of a mechanical turn. A passage in Fulcher has a similar significance. He tells us that when Jervas, the glass painter, who executed Reynolds's window at New College, Oxford, held an exhibition of his work, Gainsborough was so impressed with its beauty that he immediately began to construct an apparatus which should diffuse a similar splendour over the productions of his own pencil. This piece of mechanism is described as consisting of "a number of glass planes, which were moveable, and were painted by himself, representing various subjects, chiefly landscapes. They were lighted by candles at the back, and viewed through a magnifying lens, by which means the effect produced was truly captivating, the moonlight pieces especially exhibiting the most perfect resemblance to nature."

This apparatus, or part of it, was at the Grosvenor Gallery exhibition of 1885, together with half a dozen slides, two of which were etched by Brunet Debaines. It had before been exhibited in 1824, and the *Somerset House Gazette* for April the 10th of that year has an interesting notice of some of the slides then shown—a cottage interior, among others, with a strong firelight effect, contrasted with moonlight coming through an open door; and another moonlight subject, showing hills, a stream, and sheep. We learn, on the same authority, that the apparatus was bequeathed to Margaret Gainsborough by her father, and that she sold it to a Dr. Munro, who exhibited it in 1824. The writer continues: "We may add, of our own knowledge, that Gainsborough in his later years was in the habit of sketching designs for the show-box exhibition from which these transparencies are selected, while his intimate friends, who in an evening stroll called upon him, sat and sipped their tea."

It is clear, also, from a stray anecdote here and there, that Gainsborough preserved to the end his engaging

independence towards his sitters. The best known of these is the remark to Mrs. Siddons, who was sitting for that magnificent portrait in the National Gallery: "Damn it, Madam, there's no end to your nose." Sir George Beaumont, the enlightened dilettante and capable amateur artist, who was the friend of all the painters of his time, is the authority for another of much the same import. After mentioning Gainsborough's propensity for laughing in the face of some of his sitters, Sir George gave Angelo particulars of the painter's visit to a nobleman in the west country:—

"At the Earl of R——'s, where it was the custom to have morning prayers, he was loath to attend for fear of laughing at the chaplain, whose puritanical physiognomy had whimsically wrought upon his imagination.

"Receiving a hint from his Lordship that service was performed at nine, the thought of Mr. Horace Walpole's old lady of fashion, taking coffee and prayers at eleven, mixed itself so intimately with his Lordship's condescension, that he could not have attended even if the chapel altar-piece had been newly painted by Correggio.

"This, however, was told as merely prefatory to Gainsborough's odd humour; for, a few days after that first announcement of the pious custom, the painter not having made his appearance at the chapel, his Lordship reminded him again, saying, 'Perhaps, Mr. Gainsborough, you geniuses having wandering memories, you may have forgotten.' 'No, my Lord,' replied the painter laconically, 'I have not.'

"Gainsborough, for all this condescending repetition, did not appear. He disappeared, indeed, for as soon as the Earl and his household had assembled at their devotions, the chapel bell having ceased, Gainsborough rang the bell of the apartment in which he was painting,





SQUIRE HALLET AND HIS WIFE  
(BY PERMISSION OF THE LORD ROTHSCHILD)



and desired the servant who attended to inform his Lordship that he was gone to breakfast at Salisbury.

"A few days afterwards, the eccentric genius sent a letter from Bath to inform his Lordship that he had returned home, adding that he knew he had stayed too long at his noble seat, and, taking his Lordship's second hint to be off, he had accordingly departed."

"Barry and Gainsborough were at one time intimate friends. They used to compare notes and laugh at the whimsicalities and affectations of the higher orders. Gainsborough observed a lively book might be written on the *Capriccios* of the Great. 'Upon my conscience, and a moral one too,' said the Professor Barry, 'and I would lend a willing hand to such a performance. What think you of it, Wilson?'

"'Why,' replied the cynic, 'would not a work entitled the "*Whims of Painters*" do just as well?'

"'Indubitably,' answered Barry, who was no less candid than blunt. 'I thank ye for that, Dick Wilson; it would make a better book. In the one you would have a history of tomfoolery polished into artificial refinement; in the other the raw material—independence worked in with a sprinkling of wit.'

"Much has already been said of Gainsborough, and more might still be said; for the circumstances of his life were as various as the style, manner, and practice of his art. Some of his humours, however, were as nearly allied to tomfoolery as those of his superiors in rank who were the subject of his sarcastic remarks."

Quite at the end of the painter's career must have come his acquaintance with John Bannister, the excellent and genial comedian. Like other of Gainsborough's friends who were actors or musicians, Bannister had more than a smattering of the arts, and had begun life

with the intention of following painting as a profession, by entering as a student at the Royal Academy. As a boy he had shown much talent with his pencil, and was accustomed to extract shillings from his indulgent father, Charles the actor, for his clever drawings of heads.

John was much Gainsborough's junior, having been born indeed in the year 1760, when the painter went to Bath at the age of thirty-two. Their acquaintance probably took place through some of the artists with whom Bannister forgathered at the Academy. At that institution he left a reputation as a practical joker. Smith says that he frightened old Moser, the keeper, terribly by his "tragedy tricks," but that at the age of eighteen he abandoned art and took to the stage, following, no doubt, the instinct inherited from his father. That old Moser bore no malice is clear, if only from the fact that he bought a whole boxful of seats, which he filled with his friends, in order to celebrate Bannister's first appearance on the stage. Bannister's honourable and unblemished career as an actor, which ended only in 1836, is well known; but he is connected with our subject by some recorded anecdotes of Gainsborough in his life by Mr. Adolphus, published three years after his death:—

"His early knowledge of painting gave him so much gratification throughout his life, that it affords an additional argument for the cultivation of every graceful taste which exhibits itself in boyhood. He always declared that it was the source of some of his best pleasures, and further, that the time which he had given to its study under de Louthembourg had frequently made his advice of importance to managers in the scenery costume, and general setting of their plays. This knowledge, too, brought him into the society of intelligent



artists, . . . and he spent a large portion of his leisure in the studio of the celebrated Gainsborough.

"Bannister's restless gaiety was notorious. 'Jack,' said Gainsborough on one of these days of gaiety and frolic, 'if I die first you shall certainly have a legacy.' The actor looked expectant. 'My cap and bells,' said the artist, 'for yours will ere long be clean worn out.' Gainsborough had been long charged with eccentricity. 'That nature intended us both for monkeys is certain,' said he, 'but pray, who taught you to play the fool so well; was it your old crony, Davy Garrick?' 'No,' said Bannister; 'it was my old Mother Nature, she who put the pencil into your hand and made you a painter.'"

Gainsborough's preference through life for friends who were his juniors, no doubt accounts for much of the gaiety of spirits which he preserved to the end. In these later years, too, he doubtless found pleasure in the society of his nephew Dupont. From one or two references to the younger man which have survived, they were obviously on good terms. "One day, in high good-humour," says Fulcher, "Gainsborough offered his nephew and pupil, Mr. Dupont, the choice of any picture in the painting-room. The 'Mushroom Girl,' though in an advanced stage, was not quite finished, and the young artist judiciously selected that picture as affording him an opportunity of observing how his uncle laid on his colours and proceeded to the completion of his works."

Dupont was the only assistant whom Gainsborough employed in his work of whom there is any clear record. We have heard Northcote describing the pair sitting up all night to finish the draperies of Queen Charlotte, and he was doubtless often employed by his uncle in similar work. But his style was formed under his uncle's eye, and his help is not to be detected in any of the painter's

canvases. That Gainsborough made considerable use of his services we think certain, if only from a clause in his will, in which Dupont receives a legacy in consideration of renouncing any claims against his uncle's estate for work done during their association.

Dupont was at least fortunate in the approbation of Governor Thicknesse. He pronounced him "an excellent genius, little inferior in the line of a painter to his uncle, possessing an excellent heart and a good understanding." Thicknesse mentions a portrait of the youth, evidently the fine canvas now in the possession of Sir Edgar Vincent, as possessing extraordinary merit, and his liking for the boy no doubt prompted him to acquire the portrait from Gainsborough, on the usual easy terms.

"The instant I saw it," says the unblushing Governor, "I asked for it (it is now in the possession of Lord Bateman, to whom I had the honour to present it), and there was nothing I could ask of Gainsborough which he could give (except my own portrait) that he would have refused me."

Thicknesse prophesied a great career for young Dupont, and advised him to keep on the house in Pall Mall after his uncle's death; "for I am sure he can support its former credit either in portrait or landscape." Poor Dupont, however, followed his uncle to the grave in less than ten years.

Sir George Beaumont and Sheridan are identified with the last phase of the career of the painter. Allan Cunningham is the authority for a curious story, which he no doubt had from Beaumont himself, and seems to show that the painter had a premonition of the end of his life a year or so before it came. One is not disposed to put great faith in Cunningham in matters of detail; he is very apt to expand small matters of fact into imposing para-

graphs containing a great deal of embellishment of his own ; moreover, the prophecy which he records was of that kind which are only registered after their fulfilment : however, here it is.

In the early part of 1787, Gainsborough dined at Beaumont's house in London, where he met Sheridan. The painter was described as being in more than usually good spirits, and pleasant and witty. "The meeting was so much to their mutual satisfaction," continues Cunningham, "that they agreed to have another day's happiness, and accordingly an early day was named when they should dine again together. They met, but a cloud had descended upon the spirit of Gainsborough, and he sat silent with a look of fixed melancholy which no wit could dissipate. At length he took Sheridan by the hand, led him out of the room, and said, 'Now, don't laugh, but listen. I shall die soon, I know it—I feel it. I have less time to live than my looks infer, but for this I care not. What oppresses my mind is this: I have many acquaintances, but few friends; and as I wish to have one worthy man to accompany me to the grave, I am desirous of bespeaking you. Will you come? Ay or no?'

"Sheridan could hardly repress a smile as he made the required promise. The looks of Gainsborough cleared up like the sunshine of one of his own landscapes; throughout the rest of the evening his wit flowed and his humour ran over, and the minutes, like those of the poet, flowed their way with pleasure."

Gainsborough's choice of a worthy man to follow him seems a strange one, when we consider that the painter was a devoted courtier, and Sheridan one of the leaders of the Whig party who, at the very moment, were told off to conduct the impeachment of Warren Hastings, who was protected by the King. But

Cunningham declares that Beaumont in later times was very fond of repeating the story of the dinner, and there is perhaps little reason to reject a tradition which, in the light of events of the next year, is full of a real pathos.

It was at one of those famous meetings in Westminster Hall, at which all that was eminent in the society of that day were accustomed to assemble to hear the impeachment of the great nabob by the Whig managers, that Gainsborough felt the first symptoms of that dreadful malady which was to end his life within the year. There is no record of the exact date, but it is probable that the painter attended Westminster Hall on the opening of the impeachment on the 13th of February, and was present during the delivery of Burke's great opening oration, which lasted from the 15th to the 18th of the month. "Sitting with his back to an open window, he suddenly felt something inconceivably cold touch his neck. It was accompanied with stiffness and pain. On returning home he mentioned what he felt to his wife and his niece, and on looking they saw a mark about the size of a shilling, which was harder to the touch than the surrounding skin, and which, he said, still felt cold. Mrs. Gainsborough felt alarmed, and called in Dr. Heberden and Mr. John Hunter. They, however, declared it was nothing more than a swelling in the glands, which the warm weather would remove. That Gainsborough himself at first thought little of the malady will be seen from a note to his friend Mr. Pearce, which unfortunately bears no date other than the day of the week."

*"Wed. Morning.*

"MY DEAR PEARCE,—I am extremely obliged to you and Mrs. Pearce for your kind inquiries. I hope I am now getting better, as the swelling is considerably increased and more painful. We have just received



some cheeses from Bath, and beg the favour of you to accept two of them.—My dear Pearce, ever yours sincerely,  
THO. GAINSBOROUGH."

The painter does not appear to have taken to his bed, and we are told that he left town for his cottage at Richmond for a change of air and scene, but that he grew no better, and returned to London. There can be no doubt as to the exact nature of his malady, which Hunter and others declared to be cancer; but it was stated in a magazine at the time of his death that a post-mortem showed that it was a non-malignant tumour, which killed him by mechanical pressure on various delicate structures which are found in the neck. He himself, however, had no delusions as to the nearness of his end. "If this be a cancer," he remarked to his sister Gibbon, who had come to his bedside from Bath, "I am a dead man," and he then turned quietly to the settlement of his affairs.

It was towards the close of July, when Gainsborough was growing rapidly worse, that he wrote to Sir Joshua Reynolds, asked him to come to his bedside, and made that touching reconciliation with his rival which seems so honourable to both.

Gainsborough's letter has lately come into the possession of the Royal Academy, and by the courtesy of the Council we are able to set it out here:—

"DEAR SIR JOSHUA,—I am just (able) to write what I fear you will not read, after lying in a dying state for six months. The extream affection which I am informed of by a friend which Sir Joshua has expres'd induces me to beg a late favor, which is to come once under my Roof and look at my things,—my Woodman you never saw,—if what I ask now is not disagreeable to your feeling,

that I may have the honour to speak to you. I can from a sincere Heart say that I always admired and sincerely loved Sir Joshua Reynolds.

“THO. GAINSBOROUGH.”

The slight incoherence which appears in the language of this touching letter seems to add to its pathos, without obscuring in the least the spirit of goodwill towards his rival which animated the dying painter when he wrote it.

No one appears to have been present at the meeting which followed, and we are dependent upon Reynolds's own account of the interview. This, however, is obviously simple and trustworthy, and, as it appears to the present writer, should be accepted as the last word on the vexed question of the relations of the two men. It formed part of the Discourse which Reynolds delivered to the students of the Academy in the following December, in which he made the painter's work his text:—

“A few days before he died,” said Reynolds, “he wrote me a letter to express his acknowledgments for the good opinion I entertained for his abilities, and the manner in which (he had been informed) I always spoke of him, and desired he might see me once more before he died. I am aware how flattering it is to myself to be thus connected with the dying testimony which this excellent painter bore to his art. But I cannot prevail on myself to suppress that I was not connected with him by any habits of familiarity—though, if any little jealousies had subsisted between us, they were forgotten in those moments of sincerity; and he turned towards me as one who was engrossed by the same pursuits, and who deserved his good opinion by being sensible of his excellence.

“Without entering into any detail of what passed at



QUEEN CHARLOTTE





that interview, the impression of it upon my mind was that his regret at losing life was principally the regret of leaving his art, and more especially as he now began, he said, to see what his deficiencies were, which he said, he flattered himself, in his last works were in some measure supplied."

It is a tradition, founded, we believe, upon a remark of Northcote, who doubtless had it from Reynolds, that the touching meeting of the two men was concluded by a farewell, in which Sir Joshua, bending down to catch the poor painter's last words, heard him whisper, "We are all going to heaven, and Vandyke is of the company."

The end came a few days later, and on the 9th of August 1788, Gainsborough was laid to rest by the side of his old friend Kirby in Kew churchyard, in a spot marked by a simple stone, which by his request bore his name only—a spot where, as he left word, he hoped he might be joined by any of his relatives who felt disposed to lie by his side. Reynolds himself was a pall-bearer, and was joined in that office by Chambers, West, Bartolozzi, Paul Sandby, and Cotes. Sheridan was among the mourners.

So ended, at the age of sixty-one, Thomas Gainsborough, one of the two consummate English artists of his age, and a painter who has already taken a sure place among the greatest masters of portraiture of all ages and countries. Apart from the nature of the malady which killed him, Gainsborough may perhaps be accounted happy in the time of his death. If Providence had granted him another ten years of life and health, the world would undoubtedly have been the richer by many of those masterpieces which came so readily from his pencil during his later years. But it is difficult to believe that he would have much improved

upon the best of the work which he left ; certainly he was at the summit of his power as we know it when he died, and it is just as certain that his death removed any possibility of a decline in his artistry, and the trouble which such a decline would have brought to so masterful a spirit.

From what we know of it, Gainsborough's was a full and happy life. He found his chief pleasure in his work, and there is no record of anything in his domestic life which caused him serious trouble or distraction. His wife brought the beauty of her younger years to an impressionable and full-blooded young man, together with a portion which enabled him to develop his powers, undisturbed by the sordid considerations which so often attend the labours of the young man working his way in an intellectual profession. Mrs. Gainsborough's placid and easy-going companionship during his middle and later years was a possession of no less value to a man of his temperament. The troubles which beset Gainsborough, such as the death of his brother, or his daughter's marriage, were those which are common to humanity. Death surely spared him the greatest of all sorrows, when it drew a merciful veil over the cruel fate which awaited those he loved best.

On the other hand, there was never an artist who had a greater measure of success and fulfilment during his lifetime. There was his student period, prolonged to near the age of thirty, undisturbed by any immediate anxiety as to means, followed by an instant recognition of his genius when he went to Bath. That recognition placed him professionally by the side of the most successful portrait painter of whom there is record in the history of art, and opened a career which was enlivened and stimulated by an honourable rivalry with his great contemporary, and was attended by an in-

creasing appreciation until the day of his death. Fame and the solid advantages of success came to Gainsborough in full measure while he was young enough to enjoy them, and if his was not a life happy beyond the ordinary for a man of his craft, we know not where to look for it.

Little wonder, therefore, that Gainsborough's happiness is reflected in much of his work; it would be easy to name a score of canvases which could have been alone painted by a man with a mind open to the joyous influences which make for true happiness, and by an artist endowed with a power of expressing his feelings, the exercise of which is in itself one of the greatest of mortal pleasures. The melancholy tinge, too, which adds such distinction to another group of his finest portraits, paradoxical as it may seem, is perhaps evidence of Gainsborough's capacity for one of the most keen of intellectual enjoyments.

That Gainsborough saved any great fortune is improbable, both from what we know of his habit of living as well as from the terms of his will, which may still be read at Somerset House. Such of his property as was invested in stocks and shares he left in equal portions to his wife and his unmarried daughter Margaret, with a recommendation that they should pay such sums as they thought proper to Mrs. Fischer, and at such times as they thought fit. No amounts are mentioned, nor is anything in the shape of an annuity suggested, and, from the terms of this provision, it would seem that Mrs. Fischer's mental malady had begun to declare itself before her father's death. All Gainsborough's personal property, furniture, plate, and pictures, together with £500 in cash, he left to his wife, who was also residuary legatee, with remainder to Margaret.

To his nephew Dupont the painter bequeathed

£600, but with conditions which seem to point to a fear on his part that Dupont might make a claim on the estate for services rendered as his assistant. Such sum was to be accepted by Dupont as a full discharge of all claims he might have upon his uncle. In the event of Dupont's refusal to accept the legacy upon such terms, the executors were directed to meet any demand made by him upon the estate with a counter claim for "board, lodging, and washing" during the years he had been received in the painter's household as one of his family.



## CHAPTER X

### THE ARTIST

**I**N any estimate of the art of Thomas Gainsborough it is important to remember the period in the history of British painting at which he appeared, because his superlative excellence as a portrait painter seems much enhanced by the circumstances in which his work was produced, and by the fact that he owed little or nothing to any native painters who had preceded him. It was quite early in the history of British art that Gainsborough and Reynolds reached, by independent paths, a commanding position among the portrait painters not only of their own country, but among those of all times and all countries. As a portrait painter Gainsborough shares that position with Reynolds, but he enjoys alone the distinction of being the first of the great British painters of landscape.

The appearance of these two men marked at once the revival, and, so far as we know at present, the zenith of a native school of portraiture, which had existed, indeed, but fitfully, since Tudor times in England. This school of portraiture, which began perhaps with Hilliard, the miniature painter in Elizabethan times, was continued by the Olivers and by John Hoskins with an increasing splendour until it reached something like perfection in the hands of Hoskins's nephew, Samuel Cooper, —at one time promised great things for English art.

It is true that miniature painting has very defined limits, but native art was certainly alive when Cooper was producing his superb presentations of the personalities of the Commonwealth and the Restoration.

The first check to this promising development in English portraiture, however, had been the recognition by Charles the First of the genius of Vandyke. That painter almost immediately absorbed the chief patronage of the arts in England, and his influence either obscured the lesser men of English birth altogether, or so dominated those who survived as to make them pale reflections of himself. Robert Walker, who painted prominent figures of the Commonwealth very convincingly, was a man of whom more would have been heard in the absence of the great Fleming, whose manner at last he adopted, much to the detriment of his own native talent. The same may be said of William Dobson, who died untimely at the age of thirty-six in 1646, though, had this painter lived to attain his artistic maturity, it is probable that he would have fulfilled his early promise of grafting the foreign art of his master upon a vigorous native stock of his own.

But English art was to suffer a still greater check under the later Stuarts. The promise of the influence of a master like Vandyke upon the native school, which was lost at the death of Dobson or dwindled in the hands of such little known men as Gandy, might have proved a vivifying influence upon English art had it received continued encouragement. It did indeed bear fruit nearly a century later in the art of Gainsborough himself, who would assuredly have been a lesser artist had Vandyke never painted. But what benefit to native art could be expected from the vogue which Charles the Second and his successors gave to such men as Peter Lely and Kneller? It is beside the

question to point here and there to a competent portrait by Lely, to contend that his technique is sound or his colour clean. But let any one contemplate for an hour such a collection of his work as that in the King's possession, and try to estimate the inspiration to be drawn by a young artist from the work of such a man. As a vivifying influence upon English art, Lely's work is about as valuable as the cantrips of the ladies he painted were to English morals.

Kneller was worse. The dress of the period, which was full of picturesque quality in the hands of a real artist, and might have added a charm to his work which Reynolds and Gainsborough knew how to impart to theirs from the dress of their own times, in Kneller's hands became a stereotyped formula, which, feeble as it is, is still the chief part of his pictures. The attitudes and expressions of his subjects are even of less account than their periwigs and furbelows. In his higher flights he employed a style of allegory which even at the hands of an artist like Reynolds remains the chief blemish of his life's work, but which in Kneller's painting is always childish or ridiculous or both. The inevitable result of the encouragement in high places of such men as these was a following of painters, English indeed in birth, but in whose work all original or native talent had disappeared. England, during the first half of the eighteenth century—with the eminent exception of Hogarth, who, as a lonely genius little appreciated as a painter during his life, is to be considered absolutely by himself—was possessed by a school of face painters like Jervas, Richardson, and Hudson. These men were quite incapable of designing a new attitude, or even of painting a complete figure. So much was this the case, that a clever Belgian who came to London from Antwerp was lucratively employed in that useful office

by the Englishmen. Eventually two of these guaranteed this gentleman eight hundred guineas a year to work for themselves exclusively, and to supply the clothes, backgrounds, and hands to the faces rubbed in by themselves, "to the utter confusion of their brother artists, who could not do without this assistance."

It was in such artistic conditions and surroundings as these, then, that Reynolds and Gainsborough suddenly and independently endowed the British school of painting with the majestic native tradition of portraiture which is still its chief glory.

We have spoken elsewhere of Gainsborough's claim to be considered as the first of the great native painters of landscape, and as his first practice in painting was confined to that branch of art, it may be convenient first to consider his work in landscape. His claim to the distinction does not admit of a doubt, for, at the time that Gainsborough was feeling his way to a style of his own by the study of nature at Sudbury, no tradition of native landscape painting existed in this country. Such landscape as was encouraged in England was of foreign origin, like the portraiture. The two Van de Veldes had received much patronage during the reigns of the second Charles and James, and had left an imitator in Peter Monamy, the Jerseyman, whose work in the restricted field of sea and shipping had a considerable success. Hogarth may be said to have eschewed landscape altogether, and the only men who can be held to compete with Gainsborough were such contemporaries as Richard Wilson, Lambert the scene painter, Samuel Scott the architectural painter, and men like the Smiths of Chichester. Of these, Richard Wilson is Gainsborough's only competitor. Scott was a mere topographer; whatever merit Lambert possesses is derived from an imitation of Poussin; and the Smiths of Chichester, and such



imitators as they inspired, though much esteemed by the false taste of the day, were really only faint copyists of the French classical school, the glamour of which they sought to throw about the placid scenery of their native town.

Richard Wilson differed only in ability from these men. He took to landscape relatively late in life, and although it is probable that he had tried his hand at landscape before his visit to Rome, it is none the less certain that he remained a painter of portraits until his thirty-sixth year. When he returned to England in 1757, it was to paint landscape, indeed, but landscape, accomplished and artistic though it be, which was seen through the eyes of such men as Claude, Vernet, and Salvator, and landscape composed of the same elements as are to be gathered from the scenes from which such painters drew their inspiration—the placid skies, the crumbling ruins, the decayed classicalism, in fact, of Rome and its environs. There was nothing native in Wilson's landscape, either in conception or expression, and, by the year he brought his work to London, Gainsborough had been studying nature in the English fields of Suffolk for a quarter of a century, and had already produced those paintings of his native county, which, whatever their merits or deficiencies, are at least English. Wilson really is of an exotic school, and, the great merit of his best landscape notwithstanding, stands apart from the native school altogether. The great tradition of English landscape left him aside and passed on through the hands of Crome, Cotman, Turner, and Constable; but that tradition had its origin in the Suffolk fields, and the "Cornard Wood" at the National Gallery, wanting as it is in many qualities of great landscape, remains the first notable picture of the British school of landscape painting.

It seems quite certain that the love of inanimate nature, which inspired his first boyish passion for art, remained Gainsborough's true inspiration to the end, and that his artistic temperament was never so completely satisfied as when painting landscape. When we consider the mastery he displayed in the highest walks of portraiture, the fact is very remarkable, but that it is a fact there is little room for doubt. Most of his contemporaries who mention him lay stress upon the point; his own letters and recorded conversations, few as they are, are confirmatory, and his known practice is equally convincing. Quin, according to Harry Angelo, found him testy and captious when at work on a portrait, but "all gaiety and imagination in the skies" if a landscape was upon the easel. Beechey declared that he painted portraits for money, and landscapes because he loved them, and describes the rows of unsold canvases standing along the passage leading to his painting-room. Fulcher sets out a note from Gainsborough to Ozias Humphrey, which seems to confirm the account of this accumulation of the product of his loving but unremunerative labour:—

"DEAR SIR,—I should be glad to lend you any of my landskips to copy, did it not affect the sale of new pictures to have any copies taken of them, for which reason I have often been obliged to refuse when it would have given me pleasure to oblige my friend.—Believe me, dear sir, your most obedient, humble servant,

"THO. GAINSBOROUGH."

Gainsborough himself told King George that he preferred the painting of landscape to portraiture. His ideal for the enjoyment of the fag-end of his life was, as he told Jackson, to walk off to some quiet village where

he could paint "landskips" in quietness and ease. He was sick of portraits, he said, and at various points in his career there are depreciatory remarks recorded of portraiture as a journeyman occupation in "the face way," or of "plodding on in one way which will bring bread and cheese." Accordingly, whenever the exigencies of the stream of sitters which flowed so constantly to his studio allowed it, he turned to the production of those essays in pure landscape or rural subject which form so large a part of his known work, or to those numberless sketches in chalk of tree, hillside, or country lane, which were the solace of his leisured evenings and the gratification of his passion for the country.

It is obvious from a consideration of his landscape, that Gainsborough painted little direct from nature after the time of his removal from Suffolk to Bath in 1760, and that, unlike his portraiture, his mature work in landscape is almost entirely subjective, produced by the operation of his artistic understanding working with material gathered in the fields during the impressionable years of his student period. It is important to bear in mind this essential quality of his work in estimating Gainsborough's position as a landscape painter, and to think of it in relation to the period in which he worked. The English school of painting is, relatively at all events, of recent growth, and in landscape Gainsborough was the first of its masters. The scientific study of the external aspect of nature, now so general among artists of all ranks, waited for the appearance of another generation of English painters, with Constable and the mighty Turner at their head. So, apart from the more or less painful rendering of natural fact in such pictures as the "Cornard Wood," we look for accuracy of detail in Gainsborough's landscape in vain, and find instead endless examples of unconscious distortion of the truth. Almost all his

foregrounds contain passages of caricature of natural form and colour: reeds, for example, are hardly even suggested by meaningless brush strokes of brown paint; his trees belong to no natural order known to botanists; his water takes every hue but the proper one of the objects reflected from its surface or refracted through its clearness. The dark indigo of the stream in the "Market Cart," for instance, is quite incompatible with its environment of golden and ruddy colour. And yet, with all the limitations imposed by such defects as these, Gainsborough's best landscape remains great art. He became at last almost as complete a stylist as Richard Wilson. But his style was founded upon things he had seen for himself, imperfectly grasped and faultily remembered, if you will, but still the product of his own personality working in his own way and permeated throughout by his own deep feeling. Thus it follows that few painters of landscape have succeeded better than Gainsborough in conveying the very spirit of his subject to his spectators. His landscape has that precious quality of sincerity, without which real art cannot exist, but which, when once present, takes the spectator immediately into the painter's confidence. This is why Gainsborough's landscape has appealed to all sorts and conditions of people. Constable could not contemplate it without emotion; and the unimaginative city merchant Curtis caused one of the painter's canvases to be hung by his bed, where its contemplation was the chief solace of a tedious illness.

The qualities, both of merit and defect of Gainsborough's landscape involve, in any estimate of his work, the eternal question of the real nature of a picture. That question is apt to become insistent in these later days, when the works of the older men, such as he, begin to appear side by side at winter exhibitions with the pro-



ductions of deceased members of the modern and scientific school. Here one sees paintings obviously true in form and colour, informed by a spirit of realism, the result of years of earnest study of the external aspect of nature, and executed with a technical mastery which seems to lack little of perfection. Such work indeed suggests the mirror held up to nature ; only, one feels that if the mirror were tilted at a slightly differing angle so as to embrace a fresh slice of the prospect, the second reflection would be as interesting and as satisfying as the first. The whole scene is cut and dried for the spectator, nothing is left to his imagination ; above all, there is no style and no pattern. The picture, as a picture, as a decorative object for a wall, or as an occupation for the fancy of an intelligent man or woman, is just as efficient as a window or a photograph, interesting and even valuable as such, no doubt, but bearing the same relation to a work of art in the eyes of some of us as a gazetteer bears to literature.

One turns from work of this kind to that of some of the elders with a sense of relief and refreshment. Richard Wilson's castles and lakes are at least fields for the imagination ; and if his individual trees lack truth in their twigs and branches, his groves and shades are full of the inherent solemnity of masses of trees. Above all, they make a soothing pattern to live with. It is so in an eminent degree with the best of Gainsborough's landscape. Here at least is a man at work, and no mere photographic camera, and a picture full of the qualities, and perhaps the failings, of humanity, but the work of a human being with thoughts and feelings like our own. If art is to be judged by such standards as require the individuality of the painter to appear in his work ; that his picture be the result of an intellectual process by which he conveys his own feelings and ideas to his

spectator ; that his design be no mere imitation, however able, of the scene represented, but shall suggest rather than record, and by so doing let loose the imagination of the spectator rather than limit its operation by leaving little to imagine,—then Gainsborough's best landscape is of a very high order indeed. It matters little that at times his hand falters, or that this or that symbol of his alphabet is shaky and ill formed, when his message as a whole is clear. Let any student interested in Gainsborough's landscape spend half an hour in front of the large "Watering Place" at the National Gallery, where, if the light be good, he will see the painter at his best. It is true that drawing in the foreground is hardly attempted, that the trees are of no particular species, and that the austere student of natural fact may place his finger upon a score of passages at variance with his own knowledge of nature. And yet the trees group themselves into masses full of the true mystery of the woodland ; the cattle and goats solace themselves in the water in an atmosphere which conveys the very essence of a sultry afternoon of a late English summer ; the true dignity of lowly humanity and labour appears in the group of peasants ; and the whole scene is redolent with the spirit of the solemn pastoral which has been the inspiration of so much that is precious in English art and letters.

The backgrounds of many of his portraits must be reckoned as a very important part of Gainsborough's landscape, where the finer qualities of his imagination appear often to the highest advantage. Many of these, as Sir Walter Armstrong points out, are very reminiscent of Watteau, and it is interesting to speculate as to a source of inspiration common to these two great artists. Watteau died five years before Gainsborough was born, and it seems a far cry to discover the same sources of



THE WATERING PLACE





inspiration in the bringing up and environment of the two men. It is difficult also to know how the Englishman could have come under the influence of the Frenchman, for Watteau's paintings, which are rare enough in England at this time, were certainly not more common in Gainsborough's day. There remains the possibility that some slight influence of Watteau and his school may have reached Gainsborough through the medium of the French engravers. Most of these artists who perpetuated the designs of the great Frenchman, or of Lancret and Fragonard, had finished their work by the time Gainsborough's artistic intelligence was ready to receive their message. Some of them, like Baron and Picot, worked in London during his time. Certainly, many of Gainsborough's backgrounds are reminiscent of such subjects as "*Sous la Feuillée*," "*l'Entretien dans la Parc*," "*Partie Champêtre*," "*l'Accord Parfait*," "*Plaisir Pastoral*," and many others as rendered by Baron, Tardieu, Cotin, and Picot, and it seems plausible at least that Gainsborough's fancy was moved to a similarity of expression by the work of some of these men.

Failing this means of contact between Watteau and Gainsborough, it is still quite possible that the sentiment of the landscape of both was the expression of the feeling which pervaded cultured Europe during the eighteenth century, and appears in so much of its literature as well as in its pictorial art—the cultus of the grove and the shade. That century was the age of Phyllis and Strephon, who tripped and simpered through very attractive surroundings, until the outrageous tempest of the Revolution levelled their bowers for ever. The more robust taste for the wilder aspects of natural scenery waited for a later generation, and found expression perhaps for the first time in England in the writings of Wordsworth and the painting of Turner. It may be

that the Arcadian character of much of Gainsborough's landscape was due to an unconscious expression of the feeling that pervaded his own times.

If we have dwelt at undue length upon Gainsborough's work in landscape, it is because until lately his great merit as a landscape painter has been little insisted upon, and also because his greatness in portraiture is so obvious as to need little comment. In considering his work as a portrait painter, there is no necessity to invoke any far-fetched theories of art, or to seek in his portraits any but the plainest of messages. So far as one can judge, the man himself was almost without theories of any sort. The only known views of Thomas Gainsborough in artistic matters are contained in a few phrases of his familiar letters, which record his sound ideas as to the value of figure in landscape, "to create a little business for the eye to be drawn from the trees, in order to return to them with more glee"; his distrust of his own powers in historical painting, amply justified by what he saw of the attempts of some of his contemporaries in the grand style; and his very shrewd advice to Garrick as to the artistic aspect of his stage management, where he told him, in matters of colour, to "steal back into the mild evening gleam and quiet middle term," and in matters musical to provide "more harmony and more tune, and split that cursed fife and drum." Unlike Reynolds, therefore, whose Discourses are a stumbling-block to critic or biographer who should seek to reconcile them with his work, there are no theories of Gainsborough to be sought for in his pictures or explained away in his writings.

In contrast with his later landscape, Gainsborough's portraiture is purely objective, and was directly inspired by what he saw or felt in the features of the man or woman who sat before his easel. This object to paint from was clearly necessary to Gainsborough at all stages

of his career. We have his own letters to Garrick concerning the idealised portrait of Shakespeare to show that he was bewildered whenever he relied upon his imagination in painting the figure. There is absolutely no literary quality in his work; it tells no story, and appeals to no emotions. It is clear that the painter waited for the inspiration of the moment to be supplied by the personality of the sitter before him. Consequently we are never to think of him as pondering over the design of his canvas or taking counsel with his patrons as to its arrangement, as Reynolds did in preparing such compositions as the "Graces decorating a Term of Hymen." He appears to have taken little thought about composition; certainly he was without any preconceived ideas as to that part of his art, and all the recipes of the academic tradition were unknown to him. A sitter came to his painting-room: if he or she were an ordinary subject, or the painter was not in the mood, an accomplished and soundly painted portrait was the result, always treated with refinement, and generally showing that almost inspired ability in the management of material which his own genius had evolved from the early teaching of Frank Hayman. Hundreds of portraits of this character exist to show us the aspect of Gainsborough's art which he himself described as "journeyman work in the face way." Often from some points of view these were failures, and without any of that extraordinary sympathy with his subject which distinguishes all his best work. As portraits, too, they were often unsatisfactory. The canvas which passes for the head of Sheridan is an absolute failure, regarded as a presentment of the individuality of that extraordinary character which inspired Reynolds in the painting of one of his finest portraits. Thicknesse indeed declares that Gainsborough was conscious of his failure to paint Garrick and Foote,

and that he characteristically taxed the painter with his failure. "When I expressed my surprise," says the Governor, "that he should have done so," he instantly replied, 'Rot them for a couple of rogues; they have everybody's faces but their own.'" He was certainly the worst of copyists; he professed himself unable to make a presentable copy for himself of his own portrait of Garrick. "Not one copy can I make which does not resemble Mr. Garrick's brother as much as himself." None of his portraits of Garrick, with the exception perhaps of the Stratford-on-Avon picture, can be accepted as worthy of the subject; they all fail in comparison, not only with those of Reynolds but with those of much lesser men like Zoffany.

If, however, the beauty, or the pathos, or the dignity, or the gentility of his sitter aroused his interest, the springs of his imagination were unsealed in a moment, all the poetry and sympathy of his nature were brought into play, and there was added to the treasures of his time and his country one of those spontaneous creations of Thomas Gainsborough which are the glory of the British school of painting. Scale had nothing to do with this result, subject almost as little, nor the period of his art at which such inspirations came to the painter. He hardly ever surpassed the Lady Mulgrave and the Gainsborough Dupont, both works unimportant in point of size, but presenting the feminine charm of the high-born English lady and the promise and attractiveness of the English boy as they have seldom been presented by another hand. The touching record of the beauty and pathos of old age in the Admiral Hawkins was painted quite early in the painter's career, as was Lord Sackville's superb canvas, in which so much of the pathetic beauty of Elizabeth Linley is preserved. Sometimes some utterly unpromising subject would enlist the painter's







MRS. ROBINSON ("PERDITA")

sympathy, and produce a masterpiece like the Ralph Schomburg of the National Gallery.

One thinks usually of Gainsborough as the painter of the single figure or of the head alone; and it is in such subjects or in the more simple groups that his genius appears to the best advantage. He seldom attempted the more elaborate compositions which Reynolds treated with such ability in the Marlborough Family or the Dilettante Groups. An exception perhaps is the group of the Baillie Family in the National Collection—a picture, however, which depends less for its success upon the art of its composition than upon its presentment of feminine and childish beauty, its superb colour, and its faultless execution. As a portrait painter Gainsborough was certainly at his strongest when his imagination was touched by the charm of a restricted subject and left undistracted by the consideration of too many figures, as in such typical portraits as those of Mrs. Sheridan or Mrs. Robinson or Mrs. Graham, or of the simple group with a common lot and life like Squire Hallett and his young wife. It is in such compositions as these that the real Gainsborough appears, where all the resources of his sympathetic nature were employed to produce the perfect picture. The figure decided upon, its proper setting was produced by the unerring taste of the painter. Here were no classic accessories or robes in the grand gusto, but the habit of the men or women in which they lived, and the surroundings in which they passed their lives, pervaded with an atmosphere which seems almost the emanation of the subject itself. Thus we see the stately Mrs. Graham in architectural surroundings which were the attributes of her position; Mrs. Sheridan and Perdita Robinson sitting in landscapes which enhance the melancholy quality of their beauty and their history; courtly trees crowding to make a shade for lovers like

Hallett and his bride, or little Cumberland and his Duchess.

It remains perhaps to glance very briefly at Gainsborough's technical equipment, which we have already followed pretty closely in tracing his artistic career. We have few particulars of his practice, and lack altogether those voluminous memoranda of experiment in mediums and pigments which Reynolds left behind him, and which resulted so disastrously to the permanence of his work. "When Gainsborough's sitters left him," says Fulcher, "it was his custom to close the shutter, in which was a small circular aperture, the only access for the light, that he might sacrifice all the detail in his work which he deemed unnecessary or injurious to the general effect." He was very careful, as we know, in his directions to his friends as to the hanging of his portraits at proper distances from the spectator, and had strong views as to the unimportance of surface finish and of the distance at which his work should be viewed. As he very justly said, pictures were not painted to smell at. Smith gives some particulars as to his method of securing the qualities of correct plane which are characteristic of his work. "I was much surprised to see him sometimes paint portraits with pencils on sticks full six feet in length, and his method of using them was this: he placed himself and his canvas at a right angle with the sitter, so that he stood still and touched the features of his picture exactly at the same distance at which he viewed his sitter."

This is practically all we know of Gainsborough's practice, apart from the testimony of the work itself. Certainly, Gainsborough never worried himself about such chemist-shop arrangements as constantly engaged the attention of Sir Joshua Reynolds: his inspiration was too sudden and his execution too spotaneous to leave



time for him to ponder over paint skins and gallipots. He was thinking always of the subject presented rather than of the manner of its presentation; and so, as time went on, he discarded pigment after pigment, eschewed the heavy tones of his middle period, until his work often presents little more than a monochrome, but a monochrome full of suggestions of harmonious colour and permeated by a glowing luminosity. To use an illustration from a sister art, Gainsborough's colour at its best vibrates with those simple harmonies which a good musician knows how to produce from the combination of a few notes in a chord; even his management of a single tint reminds one at times of those ineffable vibrations which the competent violin player produces from the single string. It was this economy of means, combined with the unerring dexterity of his execution, that made Gainsborough one of the great colourists of all schools, and the purest colourist perhaps of all times. "Gainsborough's power of colour," wrote Ruskin, "is capable of taking rank beside that of Rubens; he is the purest colourist of the English school; with him, in fact, the art of painting did in great part die, and exists not now in Europe. In management and quality of single and particular tint, in the purely technical part of painting, Turner is a child to Gainsborough. His hand is as light as the sweep of a cloud, as swift as the flash of a sunbeam. He never loses sight of his picture as a whole. . . . In a word, Gainsborough is an immortal painter."

As a portrait painter Gainsborough shares with Reynolds the gratitude of later generations for having preserved for them the personalities of so many of his eminent contemporaries. As Johnson said, none the less eloquently because his powers of appreciation of art were limited, the portrait painter succeeds in quickening the

affection of the absent and continuing the presence of the dead. It is difficult to exaggerate the value of that last attribute of the work of those two great men for ourselves, or to imagine the state of our knowledge of the personalities of the great figures of their times, apart from their efforts. The beneficence of their labour widens with each development of pictorial printing, and to-day there need be no cottage in the country without an adequate reproduction of one or other of their gracious presentments of their contemporaries. Gainsborough we hold to have been less reliable as a mere recorder of features than Reynolds, whose art was altogether more contemplative and less spontaneous. But he still painted many notable canvases, which help to complete the pictorial record of the humanity of his times: Pitt, Burke, Fox, Clive, North and Windham, Hood, Rodney and Howe, Johnson, Whitehead, Pennant and Blackstone, with many others from his pencil, are all very stately figures in our national portraiture.

No adequate list of Gainsborough's completed works has yet been published; such is perhaps at present unattainable. The best, indeed the only list with any pretensions to fulness, is that of Sir Walter Armstrong. This would attribute some seven hundred portraits to the painter, including replicas, and perhaps a couple of hundred landscape and subject compositions. But the absence of satisfactory titles to so much of Gainsborough's work, and the difficulty of comparing one canvas with another, have probably led to the duplication of many subjects. On the other hand, there are certainly many omissions of pictures mentioned in letters and memoirs as having been painted. Considering the small help Gainsborough received from assistants or drapery men, however, Sir Walter's list is still the record of a very busy

life; there is little doubt, either, that many other works by the painter have still to be identified.

In taking final leave of the work of this great artist, it remains only to recall the fact that, in addition to those qualities which enable his portraiture to take its place among the greatest of all times and places, it possesses a purely native quality, which must always enhance its intrinsic merit for Englishmen. With the exception of William Hogarth, Thomas Gainsborough remains, and is likely to remain, the most distinctively British of British painters. The surroundings in which we have seen his art develop could scarcely have produced another result. With the exception of those three years in London, when the foreign influence of Lely and Kneller had filtered through Hudson and Hayman, and had become innocuous, Gainsborough was left to draw his inspiration from nature alone. His only teachers during his student period were the fields and woods of Suffolk, and the faces of yeomen and peasants of that same pleasant county. Whatever shackles were imposed by the influence of the Hudsonian school in those early days, signs of which perhaps appear in the Vernon and one or two more of the Suffolk portraits, were thrown off suddenly enough a few years later, when the Poyntz and the Honywood were sent up to the London exhibition from Bath. Such other influence as had any effect upon his art was the altogether beneficent spell of Vandyke, under which he came at an age when it might improve, but could not extinguish, his own native individuality.

Gainsborough, like Reynolds, was happy in gaining the applause of his public during his lifetime, and in an increasing posthumous fame. His work excited the admiration and the enthusiasm of his contemporaries from the first year it was exhibited, and it has excited

the same feelings in all who have seen it since. The real contentions of the critics over the work of Gainsborough have been as to his exact place in art in relation to his great contemporary. Surely this is an unprofitable discussion at the best; as well try to determine the relative places in the poetical hierarchy as such contemporaries as Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, and Coleridge. England was fortunate in having two such masters at work at the same time, and it is to the glory of the eighteenth century, barren in so many ways, that it produced them both: why then seek to exalt one at the expense of the other? Each was the product of his own environment and training; neither had the academical training which could scarcely have improved their art, and might have hindered it. Reynolds spent the years of his student period in saturating his mind with the traditions of the great art of Italy. Gainsborough never left his native country, and painted nothing but his native fields and the faces of his neighbours during the same period, until, at the same age as Reynolds established himself in London, he set up his easel in Bath. Reynolds accordingly hardly laid pencil to canvas without recalling one or other of the old masters, or without an attempt to put into practice some theory he had deduced from their study; Gainsborough from first to last merely painted what he saw as it appeared to his intensely artistic understanding. In their best work both appear as the consummate artists they were: the training of the one made his range wider; the other, within narrower limits, produced work which in its degree has scarcely been surpassed in any period of painting. To quote Mr. Ruskin, in conclusion: "To support themselves honourably, pass the hours of life happily, please their friends and leave no enemies, was not this all that duty could require or prudence recom-



mend? The two great, the two only painters of the age, happy in a reputation founded in the heart as in the judgment of mankind, demanded no higher function than that of soothing the domestic affections, and achieved for themselves at last an immortality not the less noble because in their lifetime they had concerned themselves less to claim than to bestow."

## CHAPTER XI

### THE MAN

ANY reader who has accompanied us thus far will have little difficulty in forming a mental image of Thomas Gainsborough as he appeared to his contemporaries. It is true that the record of his personality is scanty, and is confined mainly to Thicknesse's artless narrative, which is certainly honest, and to Jackson's dissertation in the *Four Ages*, which is of more doubtful origin. There remain Gainsborough's own few letters, which are the most illuminating of all. These, save in a few stray phrases, may be held to confirm the estimate of the painter's character preserved by his friends. Here is the Gainsborough who alternately amused and astonished his contemporaries, the Gainsborough of the free speech, the brusque manner, and the jaunty devil-may-care deportment, the irresponsible eccentric as he appeared even to himself. But this is but one phase of a complex character. For the other Gainsborough, "the deep-thoughted solemn Gainsborough," as he appeared to Mr. Ruskin, we must turn to the painter's life-work, and to a very few remarks of his own, to be discovered by careful search among the more numerous levities of his letters.

To take the superficial Gainsborough first, there is little difficulty in building up the image. His personal appearance has been described by Fulcher, who, however,

we are to remember, wrote many years after the painter's death. His description, nevertheless, may be accepted as plausible at least. "In person," he says, "Gainsborough was of a fair complexion, regular features, tall, and well proportioned. His forehead, though not high, was broad and strongly marked, his nose Roman, his mouth and eye denoting humour and refinement, the general expression of his face thoughtful, yet not altogether pleasant. Gainsborough executed several portraits of himself, two of which stood in his gallery at the time of his death, but with their faces modestly turned to the wainscot. Miss Gainsborough gave one to the Royal Academy; its members presented her with a silver vase designed by West, as a token of respect to the abilities of her father."

It is probable that Mr. Fulcher's description of the painter is drawn from one or other of these portraits, perhaps from that still in the Council Room at Burlington House. Apart from the youthful portrait now or lately in the possession of Sir G. Richmond, there are three heads of the painter well known either from the originals or by reproductions. These are the Academy portrait; another, also by the artist himself, now in the possession of Sir W. Agnew; and the small profile by Zoffany in the National Collection. This last, according to tradition, was accepted by his relatives as the most striking likeness of the painter. The miniature presented by Lord Ronald Gower to the National Portrait Gallery may be safely dismissed from the list of authentic portraits. It represents a young man of rather methodistical appearance, utterly at variance with Gainsborough's aspect as recorded by himself and by Zoffany; and it seems a pity that in a collection the chief merit of which is authenticity, it should be so confidently labelled as a representation of the painter.

We can discover little of the unpleasant expression which Fulcher notices in either of the three authentic portraits we have mentioned. They all present a man of a personable appearance and of an obviously forcible character, whose general aspect is one of alertness. Zoffany's representation is of the earlier date, and preserves for us a strenuous-looking young man of some five-and-thirty years. He might be intently engaged upon a canvas, or about to make some effective reply in an argument. In the Academy picture we have the man at his work, looking at his subject with the intent expression which must have been familiar to hundreds of sitters. Sir W. Agnew's portrait is more self-conscious. It is nearly full-face, the eyes are less insistent than in the other portraits, the lips are parted, and the face wears a half smile which might by a stretching of the term pass as sarcastic. But, to the present writer at least, there is no expression in any known representation of the painter which is in the least forbidding or unpleasant.

There are several verbal portraits which preserve for us, quite as adequately as his own paintings, that superficial Gainsborough which we believe was the least important part of his personality. Thomas Greene, Harry Angelo, J. T. Smith, the solemn Jackson, the painter himself, all agree in their representation of the rollicking, swearing, irresponsible, bluff, hearty, impulsive good fellow. "Very lively, gay, and dissipated," says Mr. Greene, speaking presumably of the early Ipswich days. The anecdotes of Angelo and Smith are all to the same effect. Gainsborough, in his lighter moments at least, was an agreeable rattle, who dominated the conversation, and was not slow to speak his mind to any who opposed him. "His conversation was sprightly but licentious," says Jackson, though, for reasons already





THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH  
(BY ZOFFANY)



stated, we do not know that the excellent musician's words are entitled to any great weight. "The swallow in her airy course never skimmed a surface so light as Gainsborough touched all subjects; that bird could not fear drowning more than he dreaded disquisitions. His favourite subjects were music and painting, which he treated in a manner peculiarly his own. The common topics or those of a superior cast he thoroughly hated, and always interrupted by some stroke of wit or humour. He avoided the company of literary men, who were his aversion; he was better pleased to give than to receive information."

This touch, if not lacking a spice of Jackson's rather feeble malice, is perhaps not unfair, though Gainsborough's intimacy with Sheridan and Beaumont, not to mention his adoration of Garrick, seems to suggest that the painter found pleasure in the company of men whose tastes had a tincture of literature at least, and whose conversation might be supposed to include topics both common and of a superior cast. On the other hand, some other writer has recorded a boast of Gainsborough's own, that he "was well read in the volume of nature, and that was learning sufficient for him." Certainly we can agree with Jackson when he commends the painter's epistolary style. "He detested reading," says the musician, "but was so like Sterne in his letters, that if it were not for an originality that could have been copied from no one, it might be supposed that he had formed his style upon a close imitation of that author. Gainsborough, so far from writing, scarcely ever read a book, but for a letter to an intimate friend he had few equals, and no superior. It was, like his conversation, gay, lively, fluttering round his subjects, which he just touched, and away to another, expressing his thought with so little reserve that his correspondents, considering

the letter as a part of their friend, had never the heart to burn it."

Some of these qualities do appear in the few letters of Gainsborough's which have survived, though these do not altogether remind us of the artificial Sterne. It is also true that Gainsborough's letters and recorded conversations preserve little evidence of much reading. The expressions of a Shakespearian tinge which occur here and there in his letters to Jackson and Henderson may well have been acquired by his contact with the actors who, from Garrick downwards, were his intimates.

All accounts of Gainsborough agree in representing him as the creature of impulse, but of impulses which at their best resulted in good to his fellows, at their worst in some little petulance towards people who wearied or offended him. Usually his impulses brought little profit to himself, as when he gave a picture to Hamilton for a tune on the violin, or scattered his drawings broadcast among his friends, who may or may not have appreciated them. His enthusiasm for any subject which touched his fancy is well preserved in an anecdote of Northcote:—

"There was a little picture of one of the little Infants of Spain which Mr. Agar had, and with which Gainsborough was so transported that he said in a fit of bravado to the servant who showed it, 'Tell your master I will give a thousand pounds for that picture.' Mr. Agar began to consider what pictures he could purchase with the money if he parted with this, and at last, having made up his mind, sent Gainsborough word that he might have the picture, who, not at all expecting the result, was a good deal confused, and declared, however he might admire it, that he could not afford to give so large a sum for it."

It was this habit of hasty action which seems to have dominated Gainsborough's dealings with his fellow-



men throughout his career. Some fancied slight of his views upon the hanging of his pictures led to those petulant letters to the Committee of the Academy and to the withdrawal of his work from the walls, to his own great loss as well as to that of the public. The same impulsiveness produced all those misunderstandings or little contentions with his friends or clients with which the record of his life is punctuated. His grand disagreement with Governor Thicknesse originated in his sudden inspiration to possess Mrs. Thicknesse's viol da gamba, and to return it when he was pestered for the portrait of the Governor which wearied him in the painting. Impulses of the most sudden prompted him to laugh in the faces of sitters whose features excited his sense of the ridiculous, or to impart a "wipe of the background brush" to finished portraits worth a hundred guineas each, when the originals lacked urbanity in their address, or were importunate in the matter of punctuality.

But, on the whole, Gainsborough's impulsiveness must have endeared him to his acquaintance. Certainly there is no record of any malicious action throughout his life. His quarrel with the Academy, the incidents of his rivalry with Reynolds, the few asperities in his dealings with sitters, and his serio-comic relations with Governor Thicknesse, are all the faults which can be urged against Thomas Gainsborough. These seem no heavy indictment. They are the traits of a man's character which have the habit of surviving. One hears less about the good; and yet instances of Gainsborough's good-nature, of his feeling for others, of his prodigal open-handedness, are not far to seek. A large number of his paintings went as presents to his friends—canvases of no struggling artist, but of a man whose every hour at the easel was a source of tangible wealth. Garrick, Wiltshire, Fischer,

Abel, Thicknesse, young Dupont, Hamilton, Henderson, as we know, all benefited by some of the best work of a man who could earn a hundred guineas at a few sittings, and who never lacked sitters. His drawings, too, were at the disposal of all who chose to ask for them. The fact that a man of Gainsborough's industry and professional success left but a small fortune is in itself a proof of his generosity.

Nor is it difficult to find evidence of deeper feelings in Gainsborough's character. His intimacy with Jackson and Henderson, and his positive adoration of Garrick, were free of all taint of self-interest, and were inspired alone by affection for the men and admiration of their art. Thicknesse's story of the painter turning back from the play in order to write a bank bill for the poor woman in distress at the loss of her lover, was no isolated instance of his goodness of heart, but only the echo of many another action of the same kind. We may call even that most candid of friends, Mr. Jackson of Exeter, as witness to the same generous qualities of the painter whose foibles he was so careful to record. He couples his name with Reynolds as "full of kindness to their friends, and general benevolence to men of merit, wherever found and however distinguished." Of Gainsborough alone he says, "As to his common acquaintance, so to his intimate friends, he was sincere and honest, and his heart was always open to every feeling of honour and generosity."

Gainsborough in his own letters is eminently the same hearty good fellow that he appeared to Jackson and Thicknesse; it pleased him to gratify a quite harmless vanity in emphasising the rôle both in his conversation and correspondence. Nearly all his letters to his friends (but none, be it noted, to his sister) contain expressions which point to his delight at being accepted

as a rather boisterous eccentric. "Your Grace knows that I am an original," he writes to the Duke of Bedford in 1768; to Jackson he protests that he is "the most inconsistent changeable being, full of fits and starts"; that he "talks in a red-hot way." He is Garrick's "most unaccountable and obedient servant." His letters to his intimates are loaded with oaths, which, however, seem to lack spontaneity. A man may say "D—n this pen" to himself, but to record the observation in the written letter seems to argue the writer's consciousness of the necessity of sustaining his part of the plain-spoken rollicking John Bull.

So too with his allusions to his relations with women. If we are to take all his references to this subject, especially those passages in his letters to Jackson which are not printed, never was such a sad dog. Henderson is admonished to profit by the painter's experience in London, with sly hints at its completeness—an experience, by the by, which must have been gathered in four years ending at the age of nineteen. Jackson is bombarded with sentences of jocular coarseness on the same subject. The painter is on fire with every pretty face that came to his studio, if we are to take his sentences literally. In this particular Gainsborough's bark was certainly worse than his bite. Scandal was busy during his time, and the painting-rooms of fashionable artists were its favourite hunting-grounds. Gainsborough's neighbour Richard Cosway and his sitters kept half the garbage dealers employed for years; even the prim Reynolds did not escape. So far as we can discover, there was never a word of scandal connected with Gainsborough's name, either in his private or professional capacity. He is himself his only accuser, and that in a few passages in letters to male intimates, in which he was sustaining the character in which it pleased him to appear. The treat-

ment of women in his work seems the best answer to his self-accusation. Not only is the remotest suggestion of coarseness absent from his painting, but no painter has ever presented feminine beauty and innocence with such refinement. Reynolds himself is fairly blameless in this respect, but there is in one famous canvas of his a coarse passage perfectly intelligible to the male students of his work, of which Gainsborough could never have been guilty. So we refuse to accept Gainsborough's estimate of himself as the irresistible squire of dames. We think of him rather as quite a domesticated character, of whom Margaret has little to complain, delighted, as one writer presents him, to sit by her side when his day's work was done, and to amuse himself by producing those slight sketches in crayon which are so plentiful, and which she very thriftily gathered up from the floor where he threw them.

So again with regard to his attitude towards his patrons, we believe that the independence which he displays in the subject in one of his letters was very largely assumed. "Damn gentlemen," he says to Jackson, "there is not such a set of enemies to the real artist as they are." And yet the patronage of gentlemen and their womenkind alone enabled him to live, and provided the subjects on which his fame as an artist mainly rests. Gainsborough was certainly too shrewd a man to let any such views as are suggested by that passage enter into his relations with his sitters. His impulsiveness would account for the few anecdotes of his *brusquerie* with some of his patrons, which appear to be well founded. But self-interest alone, with the thought of Reynolds and Romney as competitors round the corner, would keep him mighty civil in their presence, whatever his real views. We do not altogether agree with Mr. Ruskin, who declared that Gainsborough never



freed himself from the superstitious reverence of the country boy for the squire ; but we are pretty well assured that he held his sitters in proper respect, and that, at a time when lineage and gentle breeding had a weight in social affairs which is hardly estimable to-day, he was not behind his contemporaries in his acceptance of the fact, in spite of all his vapourings to Jackson.

Certainly he was almost childishly delighted by the patronage of the Court. One imagines that there was little but his high station to interest a man of Gainsborough's parts in King George the Third. His Majesty's countenance certainly failed to inspire him to his best efforts, and once at least he failed to produce even a decent likeness of the King. And yet, from what Harry Angelo tells us, never was such a witty, shrewd, delightful monarch in all the world, and His Majesty's *petits jeux de mots*, which to others have always appeared of quite ordinary brilliance, seemed to Mr. Gainsborough of surpassing lustre. The "Royal progeny," too, as he calls the young princes and princesses, were certainly comely lads and bouncing lasses, but scarcely, one thinks, the superfine beings who left the ideals of the Greeks behind in the perfections of their forms and features. Gainsborough, in fact, was fascinated by their high station, and beheld them in a glamour which magnified their attractions. And similarly, although it pleased his wayward fancy to damn ladies and gentlemen to Mr. Jackson, refinement and breeding were the chief attractions for him in the greater number of his sitters, and, instead of being inimical to him as an artist, ladies and gentlemen really supplied the inspiration for the best and most permanent part of his art. As Ruskin has said, one thinks of the lady and gentleman in Gainsborough's work first, and of the man and woman afterwards.

Here, then, we leave the superficial Gainsborough, and

turn to seek that other side of his character—less prominent, indeed, but which was the more important element in the nature of the man whose life's work is one of the most precious of national possessions. So far from being a coarse and sensuous personality, bored to death by any but the lightest and most licentious of conversation, looking upon women from the standpoint of a Rochester, we think of the man who painted Mrs. Sheridan and Mrs. Graham, and the "Girl with the Pitcher," or little Miss Haverfield, as the man to whom women and children were nothing but beauty and innocence. To this man beauty itself was a religion, to be sought and found not only in palaces and mansions, but in every cottage and field. This man sought truth and beauty and innocence everywhere, and was prepared to see good in everything. This was the Gainsborough who was filled with adoration at the genius and humanity of Garrick's art, and who recognised the same qualities in the music of poor Mr. Jackson of Exeter; who was fascinated by the "everlasting wondersong of youth" in young Henderson and Bannister; and who laid his honest soul bare in rapture at the strains of Bach and Fischer and Abel. It was a deep-thinking and sensitive Gainsborough who felt these things, and no rattling tom-fool; the Gainsborough who loved tenderly poor Joshua Kirby while he lived, cherished his memory after his death, and was buried by his side at the last. This is the Gainsborough who appears in the few letters to Mary Gibbon (and be sure he wrote many others of the same sort), who recognised Mary's merits in her struggle with the boarding-house, and thought she ought to ride to heaven in a chariot; who told her that religions and churches did not signify, "if you are but free from hypocrisy and don't set your heart upon worldly honours and wealth"; who was sorely stricken by his daughter's



MISS HAVERFIELD





clandestine attachment to Fischer, but said little about it, except that he felt sure that Peggy would not treat him in the same way. This was the Gainsborough, full of pity, whose eyes filled with tears at the Governor's mention of the distress of a poor woman, and who could not enjoy the play until he had tried to relieve it by a gift of money; the Gainsborough, too, who in his years of prosperity never forgot poor Scheming Jack at Sudbury.

It is this Gainsborough who appears in his life's work, where surely the true personality of the true worker must at the last most truly appear. There we find the Gainsborough to whom beauty and refinement were the true realities; the painter of childish innocence, the respecter and not the lover of women; the deep-thoughted solemn Gainsborough of whom Ruskin speaks, who threw the glamour of his own sincerity about all that he painted, and transfigured it by his own great qualities in the process. It was such a man, and not the self-accused ribald of the Jackson letters, who painted Elizabeth Linley and Mrs. Sheridan and Mrs. Graham, who immortalised the beauty of poor Perdita Robinson, suggested all the pathos of her history, and yet gave no hint of her frailty.



## INDEX.

*Titles of Pictures are printed in Italics.*

- Abel, K. F., 96, 142, 211, 241, 246, 281-283.  
 Academy, the Royal, 158-164, 170, 266-272.  
 Allen, R., 68-70.  
*Almack, W.*, 233; his club, 224-225.  
*Amherst, Lord*, 217.  
 Angelo, H., 52, 122, 209, 241, 280.  
*Argyll, Duke of*, 153, 155, 249.  
 Armstrong, Sir W., 21, 22, 29, 30, 33, 176, 195, 196, 217, 266, 270-271, 308, 316.  
 Astley, J., 194.  
*Bacelli, Mlle.*, 252.  
 Bach, J. C., 96, 142-143, 281-283.  
*Baillie Family, The*, 268, 313.  
 Bannister, J., 96-97, 287-289.  
 Barry, J., 287.  
 Bartolozzi, F., 283.  
*Bateman, Lord*, 180.  
 Bath, in 1760, 69, 73-74.  
*Beaufoy, Mrs.*, 249.  
 Beaumont, Sir G., 290-291.  
 Bedford, Duke of, 36-37, 112; portrait, 179, 216.  
 Bell, Mrs., 29, 181.  
 Bellenden, Mary, 155.  
*Blue Boy, The*, 226-231.  
 Borroughs, Rev. H., 1, 20.  
 Bourke, Archbishop, Reynolds's portrait of, 228.  
*Buckingham, Lady*, 268.  
*Lord*, 268.  
 Burr, Margaret, 34, 36.  
 Buttal, Mr., 229.  
*Campbell, Lord F.*, 179.  
*Carr, Lady*, 180.  
*Cathcart, Lord*, 221.  
 Charlotte, Queen, 242-243; portrait, 251.  
*Chatterton, Thos.*, 176.  
*Chesterfield, Lord*, 172-173.  
*Christie, James*, 247.  
 Chudleigh, Miss, 157.  
 Cipriani, G., 283.  
 Constable, J., 19.  
*Conway, General*, 249-250.  
 Cooper, S., 299.  
*Cornard Wood*, 49.  
*Cornwallis, Lord*, 264.  
 Cosway, R., 196.  
*Cottage Door, The*, 153, 181.  
*Cottage Girl, The*, 217, 330.  
 Coyle, G., 249.  
 Crosdale, Mr., 249.  
*Cumberland, Duchess of*, 208, 245-246, 249.  
*Duke of*, 154, 180, 208, 245.  
 Cunningham, Allan, 18.  
*Dalrymple, Grace*, 174.  
*Dedham*, 49-50.  
*Dehany, Mr. and Mrs.*, 181.  
 De Louthembourg, 257.  
 Devonshire, Duchess of, 248, 259; lost portrait of, 260-264.  
 Dobson, W., 300.  
*Dogs, Group of*, 181.  
*Dudley, Sir H. Bate*, 249-251.  
 Dunning, Mr., 106.  
 Dupont, Gainsborough, 9, 114, 289-290, 297; portrait, 312.  
 Mrs., 181.  
*Eldest Princesses, The*, 268-271.  
*Elizabeth, Princess*, 258.  
 Exhibitions in London, the first, 81-83.

- Fane, Mr.*, 254.  
*Fighting Dogs*, 258, 265.  
 Fischer, J. C., 96, 144, 239, 241-243, 284.  
 Fisher, Kitty, 167.  
*Fitzherbert, Mrs.*, 208.  
*Folkestone, Lord*, 178.  
 Foote, S., 312.  
 Fordyce, Alexander, 175.  
 Fulcher, Mr., 13, 44, 91-94.
- Gage, Lord*, 245.  
 Gainsborough, Elizabeth, 1, 3, 8, 9.  
   Humphrey, 7, 232; death, 233.  
   John, 1, 2, 3, 10.  
   John, the younger, 4, 5, 6.  
   Margaret, 55, 240, 244-245.  
   Mary (Gibbon), 8.  
   Mary, 55, 238, 240.  
   Matthias, 8.  
   Mrs., 34, 67, 150, 234-235, 238.  
   Robert, 8.  
   Sarah, 8.  
   Susan, 8.  
   Thomas, birth, 1; boyhood, 11-13; influenced by Dutch art, 17, 49; first portrait, 17; goes to London, 20; assists Gravelot, 21; pupil of Hayman, 28; early drawings, 30; his modelling, 30; returns to Suffolk, 31; early landscape, 32; marriage, 34; settles at Ipswich, 37; letters, 56-57; love of music, 61, 280-284; early style, 64-65; settles in Bath, 65; artistic development, 75, 76; influenced by Vandyke, 77; prosperity, 80; friends at Bath, 96; letters to Jackson, 98-114; views on the grand style, 100-101; impulsiveness, 124-125, 286-287, 324-325; water-colours, 169; disputes with Academy, 170, 266-272; portraits of, 181, 321-322; removes to London, 191, 200; relations with Reynolds and Romney, 201-207; and the King, 207; at Buckingham Palace, 209; at Windsor, 211, 241-244; independence, 215; at Ipswich, 234, 277; rivalry with Reynolds, 252; exhibits at Schomberg House, 276; letter to Pearce, 277; in the country, 278-279; his panorama, 285; illness, 292; reconciliation with Reynolds, 293; death, 295-296; will and fortune, 297-298; rank in art, 299; estimate of his work, 299-319; as a landscape painter, 302-310; and Watteau, 309; as a portrait painter, 310-319; spontaneous character of his best work, 311-312; journeyman work, 311; his technique, 314-315; compared with Reynolds, 318; character, 320-331; appearance, 321; generosity, 149, 325-326; harmless vanity, 326-328; attitude towards women, 327-330; and his patrons, 328; and the royal family, 329; his real nature, 330.
- Gardiner, E., 181.  
 Garrick, D., 91, 97, 126; letters to, 126-132; portrait at Stratford, 91-94; other portraits, 166, 311.  
 George III., 160-164, 197-198, 207; portrait, 252.  
 George, Prince of Wales, 207-208, 240, 244-245, 259; portraits, 252, 254, 258.  
 Giardini, 96.  
 Gibbon, Mrs., 232-234.  
*Girl and Pigs*, 252-253.  
*Girl with Pitcher*, 217, 330.  
*Gloucester, Duchess of*, 208.  
*Going to Market*, 180.  
 Gossett, Mr., 249.  
 Gould, Sir S., 254.  
*Grafton, Duchess of*, 180.  
 Graham, Dr., 195.  
*Graham, Mrs.*, 219, 223, 313.  
   *Sir T.*, 221.  
 Gravelot, H., 21-23.  
*Graves, R.*, 177-178.  
 Greene, T., 322.  
*Grosvenor, Lady*, 153-155.
- Hallett, Mr. and Mrs.*, 274, 313.  
*Hamilton, Colonel*, 280.  
*Harbord, Sir H.*, 258.  
*Harvest Waggon, The*, 141, 153.  
 Hastings, Warren, trial, 292.  
*Haverfield, Miss*, 218.  
*Hawkins, Admiral*, 312.  
 Hayman, F., 23, 24, 25-29.



*Hen and Chickens*, 181.  
 Henderson, J., 96, 97, 134-135, 136-137; portrait, 217, 249.  
*Henny, Church*, 51.  
*Hervey, Augustus*, 156.  
*Hill, Jack*, 279.  
 Hilliard, N., 299.  
 Hingeston, Mr., 54.  
*Hippesley, Miss*, 60.  
 Hoare, W., 79.  
 Hogarth, W., 101, 301.  
 Hone, N., 170-171, 196.  
*Honywood, General*, 89, 90.  
*Hood, Lord*, 268.  
 Hoskins, J., 299.  
 Hudson, T., 301.  
*Hurd, Bishop*, 252.  
 Incorporated Society of Artists, 83, 158-164.  
 Jackson, W., 96-98; letters to, 98-114; career, 115; estimate of Gainsborough, 115-122, 322-323.  
 Jervas, C., 301.  
 Johnson, Dr., 180.  
*Johnston, Major*, 223.  
 Kirby, Joshua, 52, 158, 161, 163, 164, 295.  
 Kneller, G., 301.  
 Lambert, G., 302.  
*Landguard Fort*, 46.  
 Landscapes, early, 48, 49, 51, 52, 62.  
 Landscapes of the Bath period, 95.  
*Lawrence, Stringer*, 216.  
*Le Brun, Mme.*, 249.  
 Lely, Sir P., 300-301.  
*Linley, Elizabeth*, 145-148.  
 London in 1743, 27; in 1774, 197.  
 Lyon, Emma, 195.  
 Macaulay, Mrs., 179.  
*Mall, The*, 272-273.  
*Market Cart, The*, 153, 306.  
*Meares, Mrs.*, 219.  
*Medlicott, Mr.*, 88.  
*Merlin, Mr.*, 254.  
*Molyneux, Lady*, 165.  
 Monamy, P., 302.  
*Montague, Duchess of*, 174.  
*Duke of*, 174.

*Montague, Lady M. Wortley*, 94.  
 Moser, Mary, 226.  
*Mulgrave, Lady*, 275, 312.  
*Mushroom Girl, The*, 289.  
*Musical Club, The*, 58.  
*Musidora*, 195-196.  
 Nash, Beau, 72.  
 Newton, F., 267.  
 Northcote, J., 201-202.  
*Nugent, Colonel*, 89.  
*Nugent, Earl*, 84-85.  
*Nuthall, Mr.*, 168.  
 Olivers, The, 299.  
 Opie, James, 255.  
*Orpin* 94.  
*Painter and his Wife, The*, 181.  
 Palmer, J., 71-72.  
 Pearce, Dr., 181.  
*Perrin, Judge*, 249.  
 Pindar, Peter, see Wolcot.  
 Portraiture, early, 58-59, 62.  
     English School of, 299.  
*Poyntz, W.*, 86.  
*Quin, James*, 88-89, 138-140.  
*Rawdon, Lord*, 268.  
 Reynolds, Sir J., 11, 65, 90, 91, 101, 160-163, 199, 201-204, 225, 252-253, 293-294, 299, 318.  
 Richardson, J., 301.  
*Rivers, Lord*, 165.  
*Robinson, "Perdita,"* 218-219, 313.  
*Rodney, Lord*, 268.  
 Romney, G., 201-204.  
     Rev. J., 204-207.  
*Royal Family, Portraits of*, 207-209, 258, 267-272.  
 Ruskin, J., 315, 318, 320.  
*St. Leger, Colonel*, 207, 252-253.  
*Sancho, Ignatius*, 178.  
*Sandby, T.*, 60-61.  
*Sandwich, Lord*, 264.  
*Schomberg, Ralph*, 275, 313.  
 Schomberg House, 193.  
 Scott, S., 302.  
 Sewell, J., 229-231.  
 Shakespeare, proposed portrait, 132-133.

- Shelburne, Lord, 106, 108.  
 Sheridan, R. B., 145-148, 290-291.  
   Mrs., 146; portraits, 147, 218, 313.  
*Siddons, Mrs.*, 274.  
 Smiths of Chichester, 303.  
*Spencer, Countess*, 86.  
   *Earl*, 86-87.  
   *Lady G.*, 86.  
*Steevens, Dr.*, 249.  
*Sterne, L.*, 94.  
 Sudbury, 13-14.  
 Suffolk, 16.  
*Sussex, Lady*, 166.  
*Tarleton, Colonel*, 252.  
 Thicknesse, P., 40, 290, 312; character, 42-45; at Bath, 66; dislike of Mrs. Gainsborough, 67, 192, 235, 236.  
 "Tom Peartree," 18.  
*Tomkinson Boys, The*, 268.  
*Truman, Sir B.*, 220.  
*Truman Villebois Boys, The*, 220.  
*Tyler, Miss*, 180.  
 Van de Veldes, The, 302.  
 Vandyke, 77, 78, 300.  
*Vernon, Admiral*, 60, 216.  
   *Mr.* 153.  
*Vestris*, 275.  
*Villebois, Mrs.*, 219.  
*Wade, Captain*, 168.  
 Walker, R., 300.  
*Watering Place, The*, 181, 217, 308.  
 Watteau, 308-309.  
 West, B., 161-164.  
 Wheler's Guide to Stratford, 92.  
 Wilson, R., 33, 256, 302-303, 307.  
 Wiltshire, J., 140, 142.  
 Wolcot, Dr. J., 255-257.  
 Wood, J., 68-69.  
*Yelverton, Lady B.*, 166.  
*York, Duke of*, 213-214.

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## CONTENTS

	PAGE		PAGE
GENERAL LITERATURE, . . .	2-24	LITTLE GALLERIES, . . .	29
ANTIQUARY'S BOOKS, . . .	25	LITTLE GUIDES, . . .	29
BUSINESS BOOKS, . . .	25	LITTLE LIBRARY, . . .	29
BYZANTINE TEXTS, . . .	25	METHUEN'S MINIATURE LIBRARY,	30
CHURCHMAN'S BIBLE, . . .	25	RARIORA, . . .	30
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JUNIOR EXAMINATION SERIES . .	28	FICTION, . . . . .	32-39
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LEADERS OF RELIGION, . . .	28	NOVELS OF ALEXANDRE DUMAS, . .	39
LITTLE BIOGRAPHIES, . . .	28	METHUEN'S ONE SHILLING NOVELS,	39
LITTLE BLUE BOOKS, . . .	28	THE NOVELIST, . . . . .	40
LITTLE BOOKS ON ART, . . .	29	SIXPENNY LIBRARY, . . . . .	40

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